

CLOSING THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP OF YOUNG BLACK
MALES ELEVEN TO SEVENTEEN WHO LIVE IN
SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

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ABSTRACT

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by
Marti Robinson
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This project context is Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church, located in Rahway, New Jersey. The writer has witnessed the reduced amount of attention many young black males ages eleven to seventeen receive in their respective single parent household as it relates to their educational achievement. If the single parent household is intentional in providing an appropriate home environment for learning; only then will the young black male do well in school and ultimately close his educational achievement gap. With a qualitative research approach, I explored the various reasons which cause inequity in educational achievement.

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I would like to thank the following people for their prayers and never-ending support and encouragement in my journey of completing this project. Both of my mentors, Dr. J. Randy Grimes and Dr. Harold A. Hudson for their pearls of wisdom and their pastoral care towards me. My peer group consultant, Dr. Tom Dozeman who taught me how to “hammer down on the nail” of the text. My professional associate, Dr. Robert Walker who walked me through each and every phase of my project and made sure that I will be able to implement my project for many years to come. My contextual associate, Dr. C. Alex Gray who down through the years, you have always come through in the clutch! To my peer associate, Rev. Gene Skipworth who at more than 80 years young is a true inspiration as he constantly reminds me that I have no excuse in moving forward with my project. To my editor, Dr. Lori D. Spears who is a life savior when it came to correcting my grammatical, spacing and page numbering errors in such a professional manner. To the Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Rahway, New Jersey for their unwavering support and blessing for giving this writer access to conduct my project with members of our congregation.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this three-year journey to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has given me the strength, perseverance, grace, and mercy needed to walk by faith and not by sight throughout this indescribable process.

I dedicate the work of my project to my beautiful wife Chantel as your love, prayers, patience, and support has meant more than you will ever know to me.

I dedicate this work to the best parents in the entire world, Mr. Bert Robinson, Jr. and Mrs. Wilma S. Robinson. I am truly thankful and grateful for your life long nurturing, guidance and unconditional love.

I dedicate this work to my mother in love, Mary Brown and my father in love, Eugene Brown who is smiling from paradise. Thanks Mom Brown and Daddy Brown for being who you are and for being a major part of my life.

Last, but definitely not least I dedicate this work to my paternal grandparents, Rev. Bert Robinson, Sr. and Mrs. Icelean Robinson along with my maternal grandparents, Mr. Ray Stuckey and Mrs. Dorothy T. Stuckey. Even though neither of you have been physically with me for quite some time; I feel your presence daily and I am thankful and grateful for the many seeds all of you have planted in me. To God Be The Glory!!!

INTRODUCTION

This project explored and better understood present realities that many young black males are facing in their daily living within their single-parent households. This project attempted to increase the majority of the young black males' sense of self-worth, sense of security and thirst for knowledge while at the same time improve his single parents' engagement in her son's educational achievement as he cultivated exceptional study habits.

This project demonstrated through Ebenezer A.M.E. Church's newly formed Sons of Issachar Young Men's Ministry that through a relevant and cutting-edge mentoring approach that we will be intentional in welcoming the single parents, grandparents and/or guardians of these young black males into a safe environment so that they will see up close and personal their young black male be transformed by the renewing of their mind. As a result; these young black males will become motivated to close their educational achievement gap while also pulling themselves into matters of faith and church like a magnet pulls in its material into its magnetic field. Also, through this relevant and cutting-edge mentoring approach, this project sought to improve the attitudes, perceptions, and values of these same single parents when it comes to their young black males' educational achievement.

Chapter one will discuss the researcher's distinct call to ministry; plus his former and present ministry context.

Chapter two will discuss two passages of scripture which will form the biblical basis for Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church's engagement in this research study.

Chapter three provides a historical foundation for this research study based primarily on one of the most significant educational thinkers of the twentieth century, W.E.B. DuBois.

Chapter four will examine three theological constructs; and the profound work of various theological scholars and thought leaders.

Chapter five will offer two distinct theories which unpack some of the systemic challenges in closing the educational achievement gap.

Chapter six consists of the project analysis, the results of said project, as well as some of my reflective thoughts in hopes of replicating this research study in various local churches.

The ultimate goal of this project is to provide for pastors first and foremost within my African Methodist Episcopal Church denomination an opportunity to replicate such necessary work in their own ministry context.

When two or more groups have severe, persistent discrepancies in formally measured academic performance, the phenomenon is commonly called an "achievement gap".¹ The US Census Bureau reports that as of 2011, 66% of African American children live in a single-parent household compared to 24% of white children. The vast body of research on African American males and education concluded that children in single-parent households have lower academic performance and higher drop-out rates from high

¹ Thomas B. Timar and Julie Maxwell-Jolly, *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Perspectives and Strategies for Challenging Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2012), 78.

school. Single-parent households tend to fail to establish a home environment conducive to learning consequently setting their African American sons on a negative trajectory.²

The challenges young black males face are innumerable. Young black males raised in single-parent households while simultaneously experiencing issues such as poverty, violence, fatherless homes, poor schools, peer pressure, hunger, deficits in social skills and social environments not conducive to proper academic achievement can be oppressive.

Historically the single parent within the African American household has predominantly been the mother however a growing trend has uncovered fathers who are also assuming the primary custodial role.³

Project Overview

This project will address this narrow aspect of youth ministry because if the young black males within my ministry context at Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Rahway, New Jersey don't close their educational achievement gap by performing much better in their school system then others will have a better experience in school and society; and some of these young black males will be left behind and struggle in becoming valuable assets to their family, beloved community, global economy and church.

² Pedro A. Noguera, "The Trouble with Black Boys: The Role and Influence of Environmental and Cultural Factors on the Academic Performance of African-American Males," *Urban Education* 38, no. 4 (2001): 431-459.

³ R. Alverado and K. Kumpfer, "Strengthening America's Families," *Juvenile Justice* 7, no. 3 (2000): 8-13.

In order for the majority of these young black males within my ministry context to become valuable assets to their family, beloved community, global economy and church; in addition to inviting these single parents to all of my upcoming Sons of Issachar young men's ministry related events; I must study these single parents in depth, using various observational techniques. If I am to determine just what aspects of the single-parent household influence the academic behavior of a young black male in that family, then I must do my best to see all that I can of the behavior of the single parent; not only the behavior related to that particular young black male.

The act of observing a single parent will be accompanied by its own particular dynamics and anxieties. In my interview situation, the single parent and myself as the interviewer will be observing each other all the time. Once words are spoken by either party; it is likely that we will become less aware of all that is going on, but many dynamics will still operate beneath the surface because both the single parent and the interviewer are forming opinion of the other.⁴ These opinions will probably pose problems for me as her Pastor.

For example; it may not be easy for me to gain the trust of these single parents as they may not allow me into their homes for a brief and/or an extended amount of time. These single parents could be embarrassed by the appearance of their homes or even themselves. Unlike my consistent and traditional pastoral care related visits to my members who are sick and shut in; this would be the first time that I tried to visit the single parents' homes of these particular young black males. Anxiety and uneasiness on the part of the single parent could be present and could translate into these single parents

⁴ Ruthellen Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2013), 26.

acting differently than they normally would. Therefore; as I interview these single parents I would like to observe single parents over an eight to ten-week period. One reason for this extended period of time is that it would be difficult to hide or change behavior over this extended period of time.

I will also utilize survey research methods upon the young black males as I will pose all of them various questions relating to their educational achievement. Although surveys will allow me to probe many different areas in a fairly short amount of time with many young black males; surveys will not be good at discerning a young black males' behavior, engagement, strengths, non-strengths, and other interpersonal characteristics.

After much prayer and reflection; I concluded that it was extremely important for me to select Professional Associates who have a heart for the spiritual well-being and the educational success of young black males. In addition; it was extremely important for me to select Professional Associates who have worked closely with young black males throughout their lives as mentors; role models and teachers. I actively recruited men of integrity who will bring tons of knowledge and insight into the habits and proclivities of young black males and their parents, grandparents, and/or guardians.

These three Professional Associates are Dr. C. Alex Gray, Rev. Tracey J. Hunter Hayes MLS, M.Div. and Dr. Robert C. Walker. I will strategically use each Professional Associate in three primary areas: 1) critiquing and improving my academic depth and scholarship on my education achievement gap dissertation topic 2) ensuring my academic integrity with United Theological Seminary's Doctor of Ministry Student Manual and 3) determining the appropriate qualitative and quantitative research methods. In the coming months, I plan on spending many hours of hearty dialogue; healthy disagreement and

heavy discourse with all of these scholars as we attempt to develop a model that will not only fulfill the requirements of United Theological Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program, but most importantly will be replicated throughout the country so that other congregations can use this model in order to inspire young black males inside their church walls to excel academically, enjoy school, and grow up in wisdom and stature.

There will be a total of four Contextual Associates who will be assigned this arduous task of keeping my project before the context, individual families and young black males. Dr. C. Alex Gray will also serve as one of my four Contextual Associates based upon our unique relationship and his frequent visits to Ebenezer A.M.E. Church as both he and his family worship with our congregation. They will constantly pray over this entire dissertation process, assist me with preparing each and every question, informed consent forms, make copies, prepare our Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church's fellowship hall for all of our mentoring sessions, make certain that all young black males and their respective single parents fully participate at each mentoring session and pass out and collect all questionnaires and materials. All four Contextual Associates will be instrumental in all of my qualitative and quantitative data retrieval and analysis process so that I can make sure that all of our young black males and their respective single parents understand all of the questions as well as our journey throughout this entire dissertation process.

The nature of this project is to seek to uncover why in my ministry context young black males don't enjoy school, why some young black males don't do well in school, and why the single parent of these young black males don't engage, encourage, and /or empower these same young black males to seek academic excellence? The hypothesis

for this project is that if single parents are intentional in preparing their young black males to do well in the public school system by consistently interacting with these young black males, provide an appropriate home environment for learning, stress the importance of knowledge, information, understanding, education and wisdom then and only then will these young black males do well in school and close the educational achievement gap.

If Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Rahway, New Jersey is going to use its best efforts to close the educational achievement gap and reverse this disturbing predicament, problem and plague of most of the young black males in my ministry context, then there must be a focused, but yet radical effort to work toward showing these young black males that if their academic success improves then everyone wins. As a result, they will have more opportunities, and they will feel better about themselves and their life chances.

The absence of men in the church is nothing new. In *Adam! Where Are You?: Why Most Black Men Don't Go to Church*, Jawanza Kunjufu says, "It seems like everybody is looking for the Black male. Black women are looking for a good Black man to marry. Black children, especially Black boys, are looking for Black men to nurture them and give them a sense of direction. Schools are looking for dedicated and consistent African American men to volunteer for role model and rites of passage programs...The Black Church is also looking for African American men."⁵ Fortunately, Ebenezer African Methodist Church in Rahway, New Jersey currently has some African American men within its congregation who practice a Christ-centered existence and who are ready,

⁵ Jawanza Kunjufu, *Adam! Where Are You? Why Most Black Men Don't Go to Church* (Sauk Village, IL: African American Images, 1997), 18.

willing, and able to share a wealth of knowledge and insight with a group of young black males who are in desperate need to do better in the public school system.

As a consequence; the Sons of Issachar Young Men's Ministry will be created by the writer to attempt to effectively address the educational needs of these young black males. It is my hope and prayer that most if not all of the young black males who fully participate in the Sons of Issachar Young Men's Ministry will be more likely to stay in school and attain higher levels of educational success; while they are less likely to participate in gangs, less likely to be involved in substance abuse, and less likely to be involved in delinquency and the juvenile justice system.⁶

As suggested by the Rhodes Model, meaningful mentoring relationships are characterized by mutuality, trust, and empathy. It is very common, for instance for mentoring programs to have a policy that boys are always paired with adult male mentors who will be the same race as the youth.⁷

Project Calendar

Back on Sunday, March 11, 2018 I hosted my first Sons of Issachar Young Men's Ministry Session; where I continued to unpack our dissertation journey over the next twelve to eighteen months. During the months of April 2018 and May 2018 I personally met with two of my three Professional Associates and I shared all of my related writings to date and also shared with them my single parent related questions as well as my survey for all of my young black males.

⁶ Roger C. Jarjoura, *Effective Strategies for Mentoring African American Boys* (Washington, DC: American Institute For Research, 2013), 3.

⁷ Jarjoura, *Effective Strategies*, 6.

Some of my single parent related questions may include:

- What is your relationship to the children in this house?
- What is the last grade that you completed in school?
- How important is (young black male's name) education to you?
- If not important, why not?
- Do you try to encourage (young black male's name) to do well in school?
- (If yes) How do you encourage him?
- How many times a year do you visit (young black male's name) school?
- How do you feel when you visit the school?
- What, if anything, stands in (young black male's name) way in terms of getting a good education?
- Do other children try to stop (young black male's name) from doing well in school?
- Are there any adults at home or at school whom you think try to stop (young black male's name) from doing well in school?
- Please tell me about your upbringing? What was it like?
- How do you try to raise your child (young black male's name)?
- How many times a week do you read a newspaper?
- How many times a week do you read a book?
- Upon whom do you rely when you have a problem?
- Is there anything else that you wanted to say or to add?

Some of my survey questions for the young black males in my ministry context may include:

- How old were you on your last birthday?
- What grade are you in school?
- What school do you attend?
- What do you like most about the school?
- What do you like least about the school?
- How well are you doing in school?
- How important is education to you?
- How much time do you spend on your homework every evening or weekend day?
- How far would you like to go in school?
- Are there any obstacles in your way; which prevent you from doing your best in school?
- What are these obstacles?
- How much help do you get from your single parent/guardians with your schoolwork?
- Is this enough help for you? Not enough help? Too much help?
- If you could change one thing about your family life, what would it be?
- If you could be one person in the entire world, who would it be? Why is that?
- Is there anything else that you would like to add?

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The reasons for writing this ministry focus paper include: (1) to determine what do young African-American males need for them to close their educational achievement gap, both as scholars, and as young Christians (2) to apply sound biblical principles so that Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Rahway, New Jersey can do our very best to make sure that each and every young African-American male receives the emotional, educational, social, financial and spiritual support which are necessary for them to overcome whatever challenges their single parent household may pose and (3) to develop and reinforce the spiritual gifts, talents and strengths which all of these young African-American males have so that they can successfully complete their long journey from kindergarten through elementary school, through high school, and through college so that they can become a spiritual leader within his family and also a contributing member of society in a fast paced and ever changing multicultural world.

Only fifty-five percent of black and Latino students graduate high school and in most big cities, the rate for young men of color is well under fifty percent. In other words, for urban black and Latino men, failure has become the norm, and what happens to those who don't finish high school? Nationwide, almost two thirds of African-

American males who don't graduate are unemployed – and more than half of those end up in prison.¹

These are just some of the bleak statistics, which continue to harm and threaten the future of all young African-American males. Nonetheless, I will try to figure out a way for Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Rahway, New Jersey to properly educate and empower all of the young African-American males within my context as I build upon my Doctor of Ministry Project.

Context

Nearly two years ago; as Pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church in Passaic, New Jersey I established the Robinson Foundation for Academic Excellence which recognizes and rewards young African-American males and young African-American females; grades one through and including twelve for excellence in education, community service and/or extra-curricular activities.

For example; when our young African-American males and young African-American females receive their report cards from their respective marking periods; they in turn submit their report cards to me for my review, questions, and feedback. Then, on the third Sunday of the month, which is what we call Bethel's Youth Nation Sunday; following my receipt of their report cards I call these same young African-American males and young African-American females one by one to the altar area during our worship encounter with God and I publicly recognize each and every one of them. Then, I reward each and every one of them financially based upon the combined number of A's

¹ David C. Banks, *Soar: How Boys Learn, Succeed and Develop Character* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2000), 64.

and B's they have earned in school. Last, but not least immediately following the benediction; I briefly meet with all of these young African-American students in my office along with their parents and/or guardians as I give out the students' financial reward; which is four dollars for each A+, A-, and/or A earned and two dollars for each B+, B- and/or B earned.

After several months; I started to notice that all of the young African-American females were being publicly recognized and financially rewarded within the Robinson Foundation for Academic Excellence; while none of our young African-American males were being publicly recognized and financially rewarded. So, I forced myself to think about this educational achievement gap theologically. There are two common techniques for thinking theologically: listening and questioning. Listening involves an active waiting that allows new information in, is prepared to be surprised, and remains open to the illumination of the spirit. Questioning is a corrective to complacency – the danger of becoming satisfied with old answers and preconceptions.²

So, in my response to the educational achievement gap; I established a young men's ministry called the Sons of Issachar based on 1 Chronicles 12:32. I wanted to see all of our young African-American males grow into becoming Godly men of knowledge of wisdom and understanding built upon their religious and Christian scholarship. I started to carve time out of my busy schedule and I consistently met with all of our young African-American males in various locations: Passaic Public Library, Bethel's Fellowship Hall and even our local Barnes & Nobles. At all of these locations, I became

² Howard W. Stone and James Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 131.

intentional with my listening and questioning of each of these young African-American males who were struggling academically in school.

Together; all of these young African-American males and I did our homework together, we discussed the quality of their teachers, books, curriculum and computers, we assessed whether or not they felt safe and secure so that they felt comfortable to learn in their school's learning environment, and we shared together other challenges that they may have been experiencing which prevented them from reaching their fullest potential in school.

As I became intentional with the Sons of Issachar's young men's ministry; I realized that I was a person of intentional significance as I made it my everyday goal to add value to people using my best gifts, skills and resources because it is part of my purpose. I noticed that I was actively looking for ways to make the lives of other people better.³

Moreover, I began to ask myself some serious questions like: why weren't all of these young African-American males not living up to their God-given academic potential? Why were all of these young African-American males having trouble seeing the purpose of the bright light at the end of the tunnel, called education? Was there a direct correlation between all of these young African-American males growing up without a father and their poor academic performance? Last, but not least, what can Bethel A.M.E. Church in Passaic, New Jersey do to transform these young African-American males and increase their love for reading, learning and school so that all of them be publicly recognized and financially rewarded for their academic excellence; but

³ John C. Maxwell, *Intentional Living: Choosing A Life That Matters* (New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2015), 76.

most importantly that all of these young African-American males can mature into becoming a Sons of Issachar if they were firmly planted upon academic and Christian scholarship.

According to nj.gov “Passaic High School’s academic performance significantly lags in comparison to schools across the state. Additionally, its academic performance lags in comparison to its peers. This school’s college and career readiness significantly lags in comparison to schools across the state. This school’s graduation and post-secondary performance significantly lags in comparison across the state. Additionally, its graduation and post-secondary readiness lags in comparison to its peers”.⁴ Also, according to census.gov only 14.3% of persons age 25 years+ 2001-2015 have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. Furthermore, only 65.7% of persons age 25 years+ 2011-2015 graduated from high school.⁵

So when none of the young African-American males in Bethel A.M.E. Church in Passaic, New Jersey are being publicly recognized nor financially rewarded underneath the umbrella of the Robinson Foundation for Academic Excellence because of an underdevelopment of reading, writing, and intellect based on a combination of the poor quality of education that is being offered in Passaic, New Jersey and the absence of a committed, caring and concerned father, then the prophetic words of Hosea 4:6 are being fulfilled because “my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”.

⁴ NJ.gov, “Passaic High School #12 – State of New Jersey, Education,” 2013, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.nj.gov/education>.

⁵ Census.gov, “Passaic City, New Jersey,” 2016, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/passaiccity,newjersey>.

When it comes to a poor quality of education, young men of color are three times more likely to be categorized as mentally retarded or learning disabled – black students, for example, represent seventeen percent of students overall but forty one percent of those in “special education” classes; and in those classes there are more than twice as many black males as black females. The majority of teachers in this country are white and female, and their personal experiences give them little in common with young black male students.⁶

When they were girls, they probably liked school. Teachers approved of their behavior. They did well, for all those reasons they may have been inspired to become teachers themselves, but the very strengths that qualified them to be teachers meant that they probably lacked the personal context for understanding young black male students – either why they were so unhappy in the classroom or how their feelings could provoke them to behave in disruptive ways. The result, as Reg Type author of the *Trouble of Boys*, described it, that as early as preschool “many young men get into a pattern of negative feedback...based on pretty normal behavior”.⁷

My takeaway from Banks’ research is that there is a major need for strong African American males to be in the classroom because of the role model factor. I believe that all of the young African American males within Bethel A.M.E. Church in Passaic, New Jersey would most likely benefit from an increase of strong African American male teachers in Passaic, New Jersey so that all of my young African-American males here at Bethel A.M.E. Church, in Passaic, New Jersey can be provided with someone they are

⁶ Banks, *Soar*, 4.

⁷ Banks, *Soar*, 4.

more likely to identify with. Back in the 1920's over ninety percent of African-American fathers were married and in homes with their children. The African-American family structure was strong and intact; almost one full generation removed from those enslaved who believed in the importance of family.⁸ In the 1950's and 1960's there was an increase in the number of African-American men losing their jobs. Discrimination would also rear its ugly head as men pounded the pavement and stood in long lines to fill out job applications with employers who knew they wouldn't hire them because they were African-American. Their backs were against the wall with the responsibility of raising and maintaining a family and fighting the ills of society.⁹

The infliction of drugs in African-American neighborhoods took a turn for the worse in the 1970's and compounded the problems of the African-American family unit. Between drugs and the "me-my-I" generation of the 1980's, some African-American families suffered tremendously; increase in drug usage, imprisonment and crime. However, in the midst of this chaos was a rise in the number of African-American fathers who were raising children by themselves.¹⁰

Now, in 2016 there is a father absence crisis in America. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, twenty-four million children in America – one out of three – live without their biological father in the home. Consequently, there is a "father factor" in nearly all of the societal ills facing America today. Research shows when a child is raised in a father-absent home, he or she is affected in the following ways: more likely to go to

⁸ Dana Ross, *Black Fatherhood: Reconnecting With Our Legacy* (Philadelphia, PA: Pure Quality Publishing, 2006), 84.

⁹ Ross, *Black Fatherhood*, 31.

¹⁰ Ross, *Black Fatherhood*, 37.

prison, more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, more likely to commit a crime and twice as likely to drop out of high school.¹¹

As I notice, listen, engage and question all of our young African-American males, their parents and/or guardians as well as local community leaders and local Pastors in Passaic, New Jersey I continue to observe all of our young African-American males not being able to concentrate for significant amounts of time, not being able to read proficiently on their current grade level, not being able to fully comprehend what they are either listening to and/or reading in text books and even in the bible and last, but not least all of our young African-American males have difficulty following instructions, meeting deadlines and not being proactive in completing certain assignments, I continue to ask myself how can Bethel A.M.E. Church, in Passaic, New Jersey help all of these young African-American males learn, succeed, fly, and develop strong Christ-like character without a strong African-American male role model in their life, and/or his biological father actively engaged with his son.

African American churches have been the longest standing independent African American institution and for the most part the African American church has been faithful and dedicated to improving the lives of all of God's people; especially African-Americans. African-American churches have a rich and clear history of educating the African-American community. According to Carter G. Woodson's; *The Miseducation of the Negro*, prior to 1861 the earliest formal efforts to educate the Negro in American were led by the church. The church developed into a strong supporter of Negro education, so that the Negroes might learn the principles of the Christian religion.

¹¹ Fatherhood.org, "National Fatherhood Initiative Statistics," 2016, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.fatherhood.org>.

Throughout the colonial period, Quakers, Baptist, Methodists, and other denominations helped to educate Africans and their descendants. Although these groups may have differed on their opinions of slavery, they agreed that blacks should be educated.¹²

In looking at the history of African American males and education in America; I conclude that African-American males in the past have valued education more back then than right now, in 2016 because African-American males understood its specific importance to race. Being denied educational opportunities throughout African American history in America forced many African-American males to seize opportunities to educate themselves when possible. Fast forward to 2016, some researchers note that young African-American males effectively stop caring about school around the end of elementary school. Furthermore, teachers halt their efforts to nurture and promote achievement among young African-American males as early as fourth grade, thus inciting apathy and disengagement among those students. In other words, as many young African-American males seem to fall by the wayside academically following fourth grade, young African-American males behave tentatively and thus lose important ground because so much attention is paid to the cosmetic aspects of living – dress, hairstyles, music, diet, art, social gestures – that the main requirement for survival – economic independence, career preparation, sound health, stable families – are often left in fragments.¹³

¹² Carter Goodwin Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988), 176.

¹³ Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995), 113.

The foregoing is influencing my choice of a theme for my project and the hypothesis that I am trying to formulate.

Ministry Journey

When I enrolled in New Brunswick Theological Seminary back in 2007 part-time while I was still working full-time in New York, New York I became very involved in the fabric of the New Brunswick Theological Seminary community by becoming the Seminary's first student in its 229th year history to become a member of New Brunswick Theological Seminary's Board of Trustees.

Also, I joined the Student Society of Inquiry and Ministry (SSIM) and immediately I became an Executive Board member. Some of SSIM's objectives are to initiate forums of inquiry, planning social activities for the Seminary community and being the corporate voice of students by encouraging active and progressive communication among the student body, administration, faculty, and with other external entities and persons as the need may arise.¹⁴

Soon thereafter, I joined the Association of Black Seminarians (AOBS) where one of its goals, is to present both relevant and engaging programs and events that will improve the quality of life for black seminarians, theologically, culturally, academically, spiritually, politically, and socially in and outside of the Seminary community.¹⁵ Then, right after I joined AOBS; I vividly remember coming home from North Stelton A.M.E.

¹⁴ New Brunswick Theological Seminary, "Student Groups," NBTS.edu, 2016, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.nbts.edu/studentgroups>.

¹⁵ New Brunswick Theological Seminary, "Student Groups," accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.nbts.edu/studentgroups>.

Church in Piscataway, New Jersey and I went directly downstairs to our basement, and I began to watch The McLaughlin Group with now deceased Mr. John McLaughlin and an African-American man by the name of Mr. Janks Morton was being interviewed by Mr. McLaughlin.

I was simply captivated by Mr. Janks Morton as he was sharing the release of his first documentary and it was entitled “What Black Men Think”. The documentary “What Black Men Think” is an in-depth view on how myths, stereotypes and misrepresentations render black men non-necessities in their communities and families.¹⁶ So after watching this riveting interview with Mr. Janks Morton I immediately told my wife, Chantel about Mr. Morton’s documentary and I went on the Internet and I ordered Mr. Morton’s documentary, “What Black Men Think”. The documentary, “What Black Men Think” arrived in my mailbox. Three days later on a Wednesday afternoon back in the fall of 2007. On that same Wednesday evening, after I settled in from a long day of work and school at the Seminary, I sat down and watched the entire documentary. I couldn’t sleep after I watched this electrifying and mind-blowing documentary as I kept telling myself that I have to call Mr. Morton and introduce myself to him, but most importantly see if Mr. Morton would be interested in traveling to New Jersey and show his documentary to as many people as I could find. I hadn’t put all of the pieces of this puzzle together; but I knew that I had to do something with this new information and my newfound relationship with Mr. Morton.

After prayer and an informal back and forth holy conversation with my wife, Chantel I decided that I would share my excitement; but most importantly this unique

¹⁶ *What Black Men Think*, directed by Janks Morton (Word Press.com, 2007).

educational opportunity with both SSIM and AOBS. I had a vision and as Habakkuk 2:2-3 (MSG) states: “and God answered, write this. Write what you see. Write it out in big block letters so that it can be read on the run. The vision-message is a witness pointing to what’s coming. It aches for the coming – it can hardly wait! And it doesn’t lie. If it seems slow in coming, wait. It’s on the way. It will come right on time.”

So, I wrote my vision in big block letters, and then I requested a meeting with all of the members of both SSIM and AOBS. My request was granted and I thoroughly shared my vision with all of my colleagues and it included planning to showcase the documentary of Mr. Morton’s “What Black Men Think” followed by a panel discussion. Also, I discussed our budget, location, marketing, possible venue, committees, potential panelists, but most importantly I shared with everyone why I wanted to lead this event and become its event coordinator; but also what would New Brunswick Theological Seminary and two of its student groups; SSIM and AOBS gain from hosting Mr. Morton’s documentary “What Black Men Think” and a panel discussion?

I called this event Bridging the Gap “What Black Men Think” The Movie and Panel Discussion and it took place back on March 29, 2008. The Student Society of Inquiry and Ministry sponsored this event and one of its goals was to bring awareness and education towards dismantling the stereotypes and myths associated with African-American males and the African-American community. The term bridging the gap means “to connect two things or to make the difference between the smaller”.¹⁷ Some synonyms for bridging the gap are help along, aid, assist, keep one going and see

¹⁷ “Bridge a/the Gap Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary,” Cambridge English Dictionary, accessed December 19, 2016, <http://www.dictionary.cambridge.org>.

through.¹⁸ The Bridging the Gap “What Black Men Think” Movie and Panel Discussion was a major success as it took place at the Livingston Student Center in the heart of Rutgers University in Piscataway, New Jersey. New Brunswick Theological Seminary students from all races, cultures, ethnicities, denominations, perspectives; New Brunswick Theological Seminary faculty and administrators; New Brunswick Theological Seminary alumni; multi-cultural Rutgers University students; members from my local church at the time North Stelton A.M.E. Church in Piscataway, New Jersey along with invited family members, friends, youth, co-workers, and strangers from all walks of life who we entertain as angels attended this event.

For more than five hours, during this Bridging the Gap “What Black Men Think” Movie and Panel Discussion; several hundred of God’s children shouted, clapped, cried, argued, questioned, wrestled, reflected, disagreed, agreed, and learned a lot about “What Black Men Think”. The Bridging the Gap “What Black Men Think” Movie and Panel Discussion touched upon many hot-button issues such as: poverty, mass incarceration, hip hop culture, black on black crime, the AIDS epidemic, the N-word, brothers on the down low, the legitimacy of Bill Cosby’s comments and even academic underachievement. Regardless of one’s stance or position anyone of the aforementioned hot-button issues; I believe that everyone left the What Black Men Think documentary sincerely wanting all young African-American males to assume their responsibility of reprogramming their own minds in a positive manner instead of voluntarily internalizing

¹⁸ Thesaurus.com, “Bridge the Gap Synonyms, Bridge the Gap,” accessed December 19, 2016, <http://www.thesaurus.com>.

a self-defeating mentality which amounts to little more than the 21st century's equivalent of slavery.¹⁹

For me, when portions of the documentary and segments of the panel discussion unearthed academic underachievement, something sparked and ignited within me. Out of all of the hot-button issues that were shared during the Bridging the Gap “What Black Men Think” The Movie and Panel Discussion; academic underachievement resonated with me.

Immediately following the conclusion of the What Black Men Think event, I met with the rest of my New Brunswick Theological Seminary colleagues, faculty, and New Brunswick Theological Seminary President Dr. Greg Mast who helped put all of this together; all of us critically reflected upon where God is in the midst of all of this information, impartation, manifestation, and revelation? Nearly everyone from the New Brunswick Theological Seminary community who attended the Bridging the Gap “What Black Men Think” Movie and Panel Discussion; especially those who were not African-American males believed that the documentary was onto something transformative and that New Brunswick Theological Seminary must continue these difficult; but yet necessary holy conversations and exploration on race, gender, class and especially education in the context of academic underachievement.

As a result, New Brunswick Theological Seminary's next step was to officially implement anti-racism efforts since people of color composed the majority of both the Seminary's faculty and students. Due to the Bridging the Gap “What Black Men Think”

¹⁹ Kam Williams, “What Black Men Think Film Review,” News Blaze, July 19, 2007, accessed December 19, 2016, https://newsblaze.com/entertainment/movie-reviews/what-black-men-think-film-review_2388/.

Movie and Panel Discussion, the Seminary's President initiated mandatory anti-racism training throughout the Seminary for all students, faculty and administration as he contacted an outside specialized anti-racism organization who would come in and train the entire New Brunswick Theological Seminary community in a multi-part anti-racism training series.

Although in 2005, a student wrote to the New Brunswick Theological Seminary's Board of Trustees and challenged it to more intentionally reflect on institutional racism; the Board of Trustees did not immediately act on this unique letter and form an action committee to explore the need.²⁰ Not until the Bridging the Gap "What Black Men Think" Movie and Panel Discussion took place did New Brunswick Theological Seminary's Board of Trustees vote unanimously to confront racism in the Seminary, church and society as part of the Seminary's strategic directions.²¹ In fact, not until the years 2008 through and including 2010 when I was an active member of the New Brunswick Theological Seminary's Board of Trustees, did the Board of Trustees formally discuss, develop, draft, publish, post, and hang a large portrait within the new lobby of

²⁰ New Brunswick Theological Seminary, "Anti-Racism Transformation Team," NBTS.edu, accessed December 19, 2016, <https://www.nbts.edu/about-us/anti-racism/>.

²¹ New Brunswick Theological Seminary, "Anti-Racism Transformation Team," accessed December 19, 2016, <https://www.nbts.edu/about-us/anti-racism/>.

our New Brunswick Theological Seminary building; our collective, and community-based anti-racism statement.²²

Now as I witnessed first-hand how a seed that I planted after watching Mr. Morton's thought-provoking interview with now deceased Mr. John McLaughlin could publicly grow into an Anti-Racism Training; an Anti-Racism Statement and a Anti-Racism Transformation Team; I began to pray continually as to how God would allow another seed to grow within me privately in the midst of a complex issue known as the educational achievement gap; so that eventually I would witness first hand a fruitful harvest of young African-American men who would be full of knowledge, wisdom and understanding built upon their religious and Christian scholarship. The Bible says in Mark 4:26-29 in the Message Version that "God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows – he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help. First a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps – harvest time!"

The next step of my ministry journey was for me to start a young men's ministry within my local church context at North Stelton A.M.E. Church in Piscataway, New Jersey. After prayer, and many holy conversations with my Pastor, Rev. Dr. Kenneth L.

²² New Brunswick Theological Seminary, "Anti-Racism Transformation Team," accessed December 19, 2016, <https://www.nbts.edu/about-us/anti-racism/>. An Anti-Racism Statement from NBTS Board of Trustees: we, the Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, have decided to take a stand against racism and insidious structure of privilege and power. We are committed to identifying and dismantling all structures in this Seminary. We make this commitment in full knowledge and understanding that it will involve uncomfortable and painful self-examination, both personal and corporate, and that it will require deep and difficult changes at all levels of our beloved institution, including this board. We are humbly yet firmly convinced that in making this commitment we are being led in Spirit, we are demonstrating obedience to God's will and plan, and we are following the example of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. We pray that God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer will redeem our sins and guide, bless, and help our creative effort.

Saunders, Sr. I founded, established and named the young men's ministry the Sons of Allen Young Men's Ministry which was named after the Founder and First Presiding Prelate of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Bishop Richard Allen.

The preamble for the Sons of Allen ministry is “to create a ministry for men, both clergy and lay, which will seek to address the needs for distinctive ministries to men, who are faced with spiritual, social, political and psychological challenges, to equip men to follow the example of Andrew in John 1:41-42.²³ who brought Peter to Jesus; to encourage men to emulate the resolute and redemptive spirit of Richard Allen, our revered, ancestral patriarch who in negotiation for his freedom with slave master Stokely Sturgis, negotiated freedom for his unnamed brother as well; to encourage men to implement ministries modeled by our Founder, Richard Allen as he sought to meet needs in his community.”²⁴

Some of the objectives for the Sons of Allen Young Men's Ministry were to create a relevant and effective ministry for young African American males between the ages of ten and twenty five to not only lead young African-American males to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior; but also to insist that all young African-American males work towards academic excellence in their schoolwork, and commit themselves to earning the best grades possible in every course. Our desire is to see each and every young African-American male set a personal goal to earn an “A” overall average and earn no lower than a “B” in every major course of study. In addition, the

²³ John 1:41-42 (NIV) – The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

²⁴ Johnny Barbour, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, TN: The AMEC Sunday School Union, 2013), 43.

Sons of Allen Young Men's Ministry encouraged all young African-American males to pursue college, attend college, and graduate on time.

The Sons of Allen Young Men's Ministry of North Stelton A.M.E. Church in Piscataway, New Jersey grew to nearly twenty young African-American males participating in this distinctive ministry. In addition to having Bible Study, going on field trips, playing sports together, enrolling in etiquette and hygiene classes, traveling to other local churches to worship with other young saints, and attending relevant workshops, I made sure to consistently monitor and address all of their academic progress and request report cards from everyone for their respective marking periods. If a young African-American male was having challenges in any social, mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, financial, and/or educational area; then I would seek out my Pastor and receive Godly wisdom, advice, guidance and instruction from him before intervening with a particular young African-American male as well as his parent and/or guardian so that I could try my best to meet this young African-American male right at his place of need,

It is important to note that Piscataway, New Jersey's motto is "a proud diversified community"²⁵ Also, in 2014 Money Magazine ranked Piscataway twenty-seventh out of the top fifty places to live in America.²⁶ In comparison to Passaic, New Jersey; census.gov reported that 49.1% earned a bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+ 2011-2015 and 92.9% earned a high school diploma or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2011-2015.²⁷ Even though Piscataway, New Jersey performed

²⁵ Wikipedia, s.v. "Piscataway, N.J.," accessed December 19, 2016, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piscataway>.

²⁶ Wikipedia, s.v. "Piscataway, N.J.," accessed December 19, 2016, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piscataway>.

²⁷ U.S. Census, "Piscataway, N.J.," accessed December 19, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/>.

substantially better than Passaic, New Jersey in this educational area; I still found out that a majority of the twenty young African-American males still struggled academically. I began to ask questions such as: Do I need to find out what the local churches are doing to address concerns about the low academic performance of many African-American males; and taking my initial question a step further; do I need to work with other local churches to build a better, bolder, and broader network of concerned Christian leaders so that together we can tackle this educational achievement gap issue with greater resources than any one local church could; or should I be radical; think out of the box and revise, retool, and reshape a very important element of the local church which is called Sunday School?

Sunday Schools were originally literally schools; they were places where poor children could learn to read. The Sunday School movement began in Britain in the 1780's.²⁸ Perhaps I should carve out some time on a different day of the week; i.e.: Saturday morning and assemble a team of competent, committed and Christian educators who would teach literary skills such as reading comprehension and analytical skills such as math and science. If the local church can initiate Sunday School which primarily focuses on the bible, a traditional bible study curriculum, the catechism, prayer, and hymn-singing; then why can't the local church implement a Saturday morning school to address the educational achievement gap issue and teach literary skills, analytical skills, plus develop leadership skills; from public speaking to career development?

As I continued to labor in the vineyard of North Stelton A.M.E. Church in Piscataway, New Jersey as the Ministry Leader for the Sons of Allen Young Men's Ministry my network of influence began to increase as word got out and around the New

²⁸ Christianity Today, "When did Sunday Schools Start?" 2008, accessed December 19, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com>.

York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut metropolitan area that I spearheaded a dynamic Bridging the Gap “What Black Men Think” Movie and Panel Discussion through New Brunswick Theological Seminary. So, over the next two to three years; I took my educational show on the road so to speak and with Mr. Morton’s cooperation and blessing we hosted more movie and panel-discussions throughout Newark, New Jersey; Irvington, New Jersey and East Orange, New Jersey just to name three urban New Jersey cities that have similar educational achievement gap concerns like both Piscataway, New Jersey and Passaic, New Jersey.

In fact, Mr. Morton created, produced and released four more documentaries: Men to Boys, We Need To Talk, Guilty Until Proven Innocent, Dear Daddy and Hoodwinked. All of Mr. Morton’s documentaries are mesmerizing as they tackle similar hot-button issues, which pertain to both African-Americans and the African-American community on a much deeper level each and every time.

Leading both the Sons of Allen Young Men’s Ministry along with my event coordinator experiences stemming from my relationship with Mr. Morton were two significant influences, which will play an important part in me choosing a theme/topic for my project along with its hypothesis. In addition; for more than 3 years I was a Fatherhood Program Coordinator for the entire County of Essex, New Jersey; which comprises of an estimated population of 797,434 according to the United States Census. As the Fatherhood Program Coordinator for Essex County, New Jersey I facilitated twelve week fatherhood courses, provided individual socio-emotional support, led support groups, and put together an advisory board which operated as a think tank so that a diverse group of community leaders would record the progress of the Fatherhood

program; but most importantly could share valuable insight as to how the Fatherhood program could significantly improve so that many more fathers would be more involved, more responsible and more committed in his child's life which most likely would improve his child's academic performance. My experience as the Fatherhood Program Coordinator of Essex County along with other personal experiences has also begun to inform my Doctor of Ministry project.

The topic that I intend to explore among young African-American males is the educational achievement gap. My ministerial skills and interests can still serve my relatively new context at Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Rahway, New Jersey through my D. Min. project because I have several years of related ministry experience in this area and I believe that I can improve the bleak statistics; thereby transforming the lives of many of these young African-American males who are struggling academically in their single parent households. The general nature and content of my proposed project will be gathering both qualitative and quantitative data from all of the young African-American males in Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Rahway, New Jersey plus single parents and/or guardians. As a result of this D. Min. Project I am seeking to substantiate that a majority of the young African-American males within my context are intellectual and are capable of high educational achievement. I just have to figure out what adjustments need to be made within the framework of their single parent household.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The two passages which have been chosen as foundational to this D. Min. project, which is entitled “Closing the Educational Achievement Gap in Young Black Males who live in Single Parent Households” are Proverbs 4:1-9 and Luke 2:41-52. Within both periscopes, I will discuss in detail: the importance of a young black male getting and growing in wisdom, the importance of a father in a young black male’s life, a young black male’s dual identity, and the importance of a young black male continuously developing his leadership skills, both religiously and academically.

The Book of Proverbs deals with the practical morality of daily living, as with profounder problems raised for the thoughtful individual by the apparent anomalies of religious belief. How is a man to make a success of life, ask Proverbs? The Gospel of Luke will also serve as a biblical paradigm to provide the historical account of the story of Jesus.

From a biblical point of view, I will explore the following theological constructs which fall within these two pericopes: the origin of wisdom, the different types of wisdom, the household’s role in a young person getting wisdom, a young person’s dual identity, and how a young person can increase in stature and wisdom so that he will be groomed for positions of leadership? In 1710, the English biblical commentator Matthew

Henry declared that no book was more “serviceable” for the “right ordering” of human behavior than the biblical book of Proverbs.¹

Henry also noted that Proverbs was written for the use of all persons, but especially for the simple, the ignorant and the young. Youth is the time of learning, he stated, the age of instruction and impressions. “And, if young people will but take heed to their ways according to Solomon’s Proverbs, they will soon gain the knowledge and discretion of the ancients. Solomon had an eye to posterity in writing this book, hoping by it to season the minds of the rising generation with the generous principles of wisdom and virtue.”²

Furthermore; Henry believed that the purpose of the Book of Proverbs was to rectify what is amiss in our hearts and lives. Therefore, in his commentary he described the glorious things spoken of wisdom and the benefits it bestowed by contrast with the counsels and devices of Satan.³

True wisdom instructs us to hate all sin, it makes those happy who receive and embrace it. According to Henry, the wise are happy in their “love of Christ, in the pursuit of their relationship with Christ, in so much of the wealth of the world as wisdom gives them, in the way of righteousness and grace, and in the glory of God hereafter, accordingly, he exhorted his readers to hear and obey the voice of wisdom.” For those

¹ Stephen Stein, “Like Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver: The Portrait of Wisdom in Jonathan Edward’s Commentary on the Book of Proverbs,” *Church History* 54, no. 3 (Sept. 1985): 324.

² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (Old Tappan, NJ: World, 1970), 3: 790, 792.

³ Stein, “Like Apples of Gold,” 332.

who hearken to it are assured of happiness, whereas those who reject wisdom's proposals will be sentenced to doom.⁴

Modern biblical critics suggest that Proverbs may have been compiled as a text book for the education of young men during the fifth and fourth centuries before Christ. It was designed by the sages to teach "wisdom and discretion" to those in the "better" homes in Israel, to serve as a "source book for rules of good and profitable behavior."⁵

The Gospel of Luke's primary purpose was to give an orderly historical account which could form the basis for a sound Christian faith on the part of those who had already been instructed, perhaps imperfectly and incompletely in the story of Jesus.⁶

As a matter of fact, the Gospel of Luke is the only gospel to include a story from Jesus' childhood. The word "days" in which key events took place in the Gospel of Luke frequently occur. The reason is that the term "days" is expressive of Luke's style. Luke writes his Gospel to account for "things which have been accomplished among us" in days' past.⁷ The days of significance which will be later discussed in my biblical foundations paper are "the days" between Jesus' infancy and his baptism. During these "days" the boy Jesus appears as a Gnostic revealer who confounds the teachers by explaining not only the law but also astronomy, physics and metaphysics!⁸

⁴ Stein, "Like Apples of Gold," 332.

⁵ George Arthur Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1962), 3: 936-937.

⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 7.

⁷ Arland J. Hulton, "Interpreting the Gospel of Luke," *Interpretation* 30, no. 4 (Oct. 1976): 35.

⁸ Rene Laurentin, *Jesus au Temple* (Paris, France: Libranne Lec Offer, 1966), 52; P. J. Temple, *The Boyhood Consciousness of Christ* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 18f.

One of the developmental tasks of childhood, teenage and young adulthood is discovery and affirming one's identity. Jesus found his identity by affirming his relationship with God. Both searching and finding occur frequently in the Gospel of Luke. Together they mirror the youthful experience of questing for something better, for truth, for achievement, for knowledge, for love or for God. Jesus' parents were searching for Jesus while Jesus sought to be about the tasks that his divine father had set for him. What we are searching for reveals a great deal about who we are.⁹

Old Testament

Wisdom is a capacity that is inherent in human beings as persons. It is a human trait, an element of our created-ness. Although people are not wise by virtue of being created, they are created with the potential of thinking, speaking and acting wisely. This capacity cannot be denied to anyone; in fact, it was once even said that animals could behave wisely. (Proverbs 30:24-28).¹⁰ Wisdom is valuable. Wisdom is a blessing. Wisdom is a gift from God. Wisdom is a virtue that unites people, unites families, unites beloved communities and unites churches. Wisdom grows as it richly dwells with a person. "There is one quality that improves with age. That quality happens to be a wonderful virtue. It is wisdom."¹¹

"These differences are reflected in the usages of the several Hebrew words for fool, antithesis of the wise man. The pethi is the naïve, untutored youth whose

⁹ *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 9 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1995), 78.

¹⁰ Claus Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom: The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and Other Peoples* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 1.

¹¹ Val Farmer, "Wisdom is One Virtue that Improves with Age," Center for Practical Wisdom – The University of Chicago, accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.wisdomresearch.org>.

intelligence has not been awakened. He is simple, but not, as some translations put it, “a simpleton”. The kesil is stupid. The evil or sakal is obstinate in his folly. The baar is crude. The nabal brutal and depraved, the holel irrational to the point of madness. The less is the foolish talker, opinionated and insolent.¹²

There is no quick and simple answer to the question of what wisdom means in the writings of the Bible. For one thing, wisdom corresponds only in part to what we usually think of today as wisdom-sagacity, insight, good judgment as to what one should do in each situation, in the light of human values and goals. The line between wisdom and knowledge was not so sharply drawn in ancient Israel as with the Greek philosophers and with us. The wise man then was, in the first instance, the knowledgeable man, the man with some special skill, above all the man who could teach others because he had superior understanding about how life should be lived and what it means.¹³

Teachers in ancient Israel knew students vary in knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence. Students might be open to instruction or might resist instruction. Some students were unteachable because they could not learn, while other students simply would not learn.¹⁴

Though Proverbs does not mention the salvation history of Israel as in the Pentateuch and the Prophets, the reader must not ignore that implicit covenantal context of the book. The foundational motto concerning the fear of Yahweh, the covenant of God of Israel, tied creation and covenant together. In other words, Israel’s wise men did

¹² David. A. Hubbard, “Proverbs,” *The Communicator’s Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word Press, 1989), 17.

¹³ R. B. Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 56.

¹⁴ Scott, *The Way of Wisdom*, 39.

not have a different religion from the psalmist and the prophets (Proverbs 29). The place of Wisdom Literature has received perhaps less attention than is its due. This is largely because its themes have appeared peripheral, if not incompatible with the dominant idea of a “history of salvation of God’s chosen people and of his special revelation through mighty acts of salvation and judgment.”¹⁵

In Proverbs 1-9; wisdom is spoken of as one who was with Yahweh at the creation of the world by whom kings and now and always reign and the social order maintains, and who is to be found at the crossroads of life calling upon men to recognize her presence and receive her words which “are life to him who finds them.”¹⁶ The goal of wisdom was the formation of character and to make sense of life’s anomalies.¹⁷ Instruction, which took place initially in a family setting, focused on individuals rather than society in general. Mothers and fathers strove to shape moral character in their children by offering them the benefit of their accumulated insights. Their advice was traditional, conservative, and for the most part positive.¹⁸

The beginnings of wisdom literature in Israel were undoubtedly associated with Solomon’s court. Three different meanings are given to Solomon’s court in First Kings. First is the discernment needed to administer justice. The second, is an encyclopedic knowledge surpassing that of all others. The third, is the praise of the statesmanship right from the start of the Solomonic history, wisdom appears as a special gift granted to

¹⁵ Scott, *The Way of Wisdom*, 39.

¹⁶ Mark L. Burton, “Wisdom, Myth and Mythology,” *Interpretation* 24, no. 1 (Jan. 1970): 41.

¹⁷ William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 79.

¹⁸ Hubbard, “Proverbs,” 21.

Solomon by Yahweh at the time of his dream at Gibeon. “Behold, I have done according to thy words; lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee” (1 Kings 3:12). Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt (1 Kings 4:30). Also, Solomon’s wisdom as also comprised of intelligence, knowledge, and the art of speaking well, as “he spake three thousand proverbs and his songs were a thousand and five.” (1 Kings 4:32).

The instruction of Amenemope is the name conventional given to the Egyptian literacy text and is familiar to biblical scholars chiefly because of its affinities to the Hebrew Proverbs.¹⁹ There are close parallels between sections of Proverbs and Amenemope. Hypothetically, it is possible that Proverbs is dependent upon Amenemope, that Amenemope is dependent upon Proverbs or that Proverbs derive from a common source, either Egyptian or Semitic.²⁰ The name Amenemope is a common New Kingdom period name and it is likely that under the name Amenemope instruction was handed down in the circles of Egyptian schools. Exactly how the sages of Israel became familiar with Egyptian wisdom is not known, although it is likely through the Phoenicians who had commercial relationships with the Egyptians by means of sea trade.²¹ Whether the influence was direct or passed to Israel through the Phoenicians is a question that cannot be answered with precision.

¹⁹ Harold C. Washington, *Wealth and Poverty in the Instruction of Amenemope and the Hebrew Proverbs* (Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 1994), 7.

²⁰ Washington, *Wealth and Poverty*, 135.

²¹ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2007), 43.

Terms common to both Egyptian wisdom and Israelite wisdom are “instruction” = musar, “beating”, “rod”, “stick” = naka, “ignorant student” = hasar leb, “person of positive character” = kar ruah, and the ear as the organ of learning.²² Features common to both Egyptian wisdom and Israelite wisdom are the educational process in the home and later in schools, where admonition is added to observation, as well as the intellectual curiosity and moral concern of individuals engaged in a search for knowledge of the physical environment, and for understanding of a divine order encompassing human excellence.²³ The focus is on the individual and on his training, education, instruction, learning and his understanding.

In contrast to many books of the Bible, the purpose of Proverbs is clearly stated in Proverbs 1:2-6 where the Bible states that “to know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment and equity; to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear; and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain wise counsels; to understand and a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings”.

Though the setting of Proverbs has been debated (whether it was the royal court or the home), the data seems to indicate that the Book of Proverbs in its canonical form was an instructional manual designed for use by the young men of Israel’s society who were being groomed for positions of leadership.²⁴ Hubbard cogently argues that the

²² Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 93.

²³ Scott, *The Way of Wisdom*, 29.

²⁴ Hubbard, “Proverbs,” 17.

centralization of government under David and Solomon called for many administrations to be trained for positions of responsibility. Beginning in Solomon's day there may have been schooling system such as was known in Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia. Hezekiah may also have had a similar system. (Proverbs 25:1).²⁵

The motto of the book of Proverbs is found in 1:7 and 9:10 where the Bible states that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction. This simply means obedience to the divine will. Therefore, the reader of the Book of Proverbs must eliminate in the case of the word fear, the idea of something emotional, of a specific physical form of the experience of God. In this context, the term is probably used even in a still more general humane sense, akin to our commitment to knowledge about Yahweh. In other words, the fear of God leads to wisdom. It enables a man to acquire wisdom, it trains him for wisdom."²⁶

This serves as the compass which gives direction to Chapters 1-9 since the underlying basics of life is one's relationship to God. Out of that relationship grows moral understanding, the ability to judge what is right as well as other practical benefits of one's relationship to God.²⁷

Proverbs 4 could be used by the reader to warn young people of the dangers of not deciding for the Lord and to motivate them to commitment. Life is a series of folks in the road where decisions must be made. Youth must pay attention to the road in order not to

²⁵ Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1972), 66.

²⁶ Hubbard, "Proverbs," 26.

²⁷ Hassel C. Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Books* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988), 161.

miss the correct turns.²⁸ The feminization of wisdom dominates Proverbs 4 as Proverbs 4 points to the teaching of mothers who either were the senior females in the household responsible for instruction of children and older girls or teachers in wisdom schools and royal courts who bore this honorific title in the same way that male teachers were called “fathers”.²⁹

Other social roles attributed to women, in addition to being sages, teachers and counselor, include those of the senior female in the household, who managed many of its economic and social affairs; the wife, lover, counselor of the husband; the adulteress and prostitute.³⁰ What is most striking about the feminization of wisdom is the personification of woman wisdom as a metaphor, along with its opponent, woman folly. In the four didactic poems on woman wisdom (Proverbs 1:20-33; 3:13-20, 8:1-36 and 9:1-11) she is presented as the instrument by which God created the earth, the daughter in whom he takes delight, the queen of heaven who elects kings and dispenses wealth and success to her royal devotees, the goodness who inaugurates her school of instruction, and the sage whose teaching brings life to her followers.³¹

In the pericope found here in Proverbs 4:1-9, the one she honors with a crown, at least metaphorically speaking, is the aspiring sage who obeys the teacher’s instruction and comes to love and cherish her. Woman wisdom, who creates and governs the world is

²⁸ Robert L. Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Press, 1983), 160.

²⁹ Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2011, 49.

³⁰ Perdue, *Proverbs*, 49.

³¹ Perdue, *Proverbs*, 50.

accessible to the sages who devote their life to seeking and adoring her.³² Also, there are two major sections, each of which has five lines: verse 1-5a and 5b-9.

(1) Hear ye children. The instruction of a father, and attend to know Understanding. (2) For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. (3) For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother (4) He taught me also, and said unto me, let thine heart retain my word; keep my commandments, and live. (5) Get wisdom; get understanding: forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her and she shall keep thee. (7) Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom and with all thy getting get understanding (8) Exalt her; and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. (9) She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory she shall deliver to thee.

There is a unified theme repeated in verses 5a and 7, which states “Get wisdom, get understanding.” In the first section, the teacher received instruction from parents in the household, who taught the importance of observing and keeping their instruction to live. The second section sets forth the blessing offered by woman wisdom to the young people who choose to follow her teachings and honor her with devotion and dedication.³³

The first section (vv. 1-5a) begins with the address of the students (“sons” – KJV “children”) who are called on to hear (i.e., listen to and obey) the instruction (musar) of the “father” (probably the title of a male teacher in a wisdom school). The imperative plural with the plural noun (sons) found in verse 1 has been the object of several interpretations. But it is hardly likely that a father would call upon coming generations of the sons to listen or that an old father would call upon his sons and their sons to sit in class together.³⁴ These students are exhorted to “be attentive” to gain [literally, “know”] insight. Insight or understanding is a virtue comparable to wisdom and refers to the

³² Perdue, *Proverbs*, 112.

³³ Perdue, *Proverbs*, 112.

³⁴ Perdue, *Proverbs*, 112.

ability to analyze ever complex situations and problems and understand or know how to act in a proper and successful fashion (Proverbs 3:5, 23:4).³⁵

Conversely, James Alfred Loder views the first section (vv. 1-5a) as the opening poem of Proverbs Chapter 4 not only recommends wisdom but calls for an erotic relationship with her. This is not only an angle suitable for the audience (“Listen, my sons to a father’s instruction”, NIV v1), but it also prepares the warning against the temptations of the “strange woman” still to come in Proverbs Chapters 5, 6, and 7.³⁶ Therefore the erotic language in Proverbs 4:1-9 first and foremost functions on the metaphoric level (love of wisdom as defense against folly/evil in general) and secondly on the literal level (love of wisdom as defense mechanism against illicit love)³⁷

In Proverbs Chapter 4, verse 2, the father says that he gives the received doctrine/tradition further. The father implies that he passes on what he has received as he received it unchanged. Therefore, it is not necessary to interpret the meanings “doctrine” and “tradition” because it is a fixed tradition, it is a fixed doctrine.³⁸

However, the passing on of tradition implies more. Behind the doctrine stands the authority of the fathers. It is therefore no small matter of the opinion of a teacher but concerns the force of the whole tradition. In verse 1, the father calls the instruction “my” instruction and in verse 2 the father passes the doctrine on but calls it “my” law (verse 2b). This is to express fatherly discipline. It unquestionably lays claim to the father’s

³⁵ James Alfred Loder, *Proverbs 1-9: Historical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Leuven Belgium: Peters, Bondgenotenlaan, 2014), 198.

³⁶ Loder, *Proverbs 1-9*, 199.

³⁷ Loder, *Proverbs 1-9*, 199.

³⁸ Loder, *Proverbs 1-9*, 202.

status as a teacher. But there is conceivably more to it. The students are not confronted with “thus saith the Lord!” but they are called upon to listen to the father’s law, to words that come from a father and from a father’s father.³⁹

In Proverbs Chapter 4, verses 3-4a we find a son of a father which is somewhat natural. The mention of the mother back in Proverbs 1:8, where the Bible states “my son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother” places emphasis on the household setting and the age of the son. He was still soft and therefore in the care of his mother when his father judged him to be old enough to move into the sphere of fatherly educational responsibility. Mothers took responsibility for small children and fathers took over when they were old enough for the kind of material we find in a book. Bring the only one before his mother does not necessarily have to mean that he was the only boy of the time still in the care of his mother.⁴⁰

It is therefore a prominent feature of the teaching of the wise of the Old Testament that the household is regarded as the most basic and primary functioning unit of the community. Consequently, we find repeatedly in the wisdom admonitions a concern to preserve its unity and integrity. Such individual households were seen to constitute the primary economic units within the community so that the property of individuals was dependent upon the prosperity of the household in which they were resident. At the same time, such capital as a family acquired became part of the inheritance which was kept within the household family unit.⁴¹

³⁹ Loder, *Proverbs 1-9*, 202.

⁴⁰ Loder, *Proverbs 1-9*, 203.

⁴¹ R. E. Clements, *Wisdom in Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 26.

Obligations stem from an emphasis placed upon the individual household. In the pre-exilic morality of Israel, the family had assumed the major role in enforcing discipline, exacting revenge, and where necessary, protecting the interests of weaker members of the family group. In understanding the wise, however, these obligations and supports based on family links are almost entirely subsumed under the notion of the household. So, the household is presented as the unit of society in which prosperity, and blessing can take effect and where security is provided.⁴²

Keeping the law, keeping the commandments seem to be a matter of life and death as Proverbs Chapter 4 verse 4b-c states: “NKJV- let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live” In verse 5 of Proverbs Chapter 4: we find a double command, “Get wisdom, get understanding” shows a parallel meaning but the interesting aspect is the use of the verb (get, acquire) is the direct object of the verb in this verse as well as in verse 7 and in Proverbs 23:23. But it can also mean to “acquire a wife” because wisdom can be viewed as a bride. This fits our context very well considering the erotic allusion to the relationship between the student and wisdom in verse 6 where the Bible states: “forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee”.⁴³

The relationship between student and wisdom is portrayed as that between a man and woman although Holy Matrimony is not a part of this relationship. Loving a woman of wisdom does not require being married to her. Here in verse 6 of Proverbs, Chapter 4, the young son/lover is admonished not to forsake her which only makes sense as part of a

⁴² Clements, *Wisdom in Theology*, 131.

⁴³ Loder, *Proverbs 1-9*, 204.

marriage metaphor. The woman of wisdom in return, “keeps” and “saves” her loving husband. Despite being sought and “taken”, the metaphorical woman obviously in the stronger partner in the marriage and has a greater input to offer than her husband.⁴⁴

Verse 7 of Proverbs Chapter 4 follows the same pattern of a double command to “get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Considering Proverbs Chapter 1, verse 7, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction”, wisdom only begins if you “go get it”. In other words, the student must take the initiative and actively do something. The student is required to give very much to acquire wisdom. He must be prepared to invest all he has (literally, all he has acquired to get it because the wife is of such value).⁴⁵

In verse 7 of Proverbs Chapter 4 we find “exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. When the young son/lover exalts her, he holds her high and therefore wisdom will make him high. “Making high” is again, synonymous with the very next word, “she will make you weighty”, that is, she will bring you honour if you embrace her. In Ugaritic the verb, embrace is used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, but even if it is not, the erotic reference is abundantly clear.⁴⁶

An interesting facet of the imagery is its openness to feminist interpretation. Although it is the young man/lover who must “get”, “acquire” “take”, “love” and “embrace” her, wisdom as the wife is the one who does the protecting brings the honour

⁴⁴ Loder, *Proverbs 1-9*, 205.

⁴⁵ Loder, *Proverbs 1-9*, 205-06.

⁴⁶ G. Bauman, *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1-9: Traditionen Geschichtliche und Theologische Studien*, Forschungen Zum Alten Testament, vol. 16 (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 242.

and sees to it that her young husband profits. Her input into the relationship is much greater than that of the imagined husband, just like the real wife in Proverbs 31:10, who contributes astoundingly bountiful profits where the husband only sits in the town gate being important. If the wife is worth more than the husband, it is no wonder her price is so high both here in verse 7 and in the final word of Proverbs 31:31, where the Bible states: “Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates”.⁴⁷

The last verse, verse 9 of Proverbs Chapter 4 shares with the reader exactly what the woman of wisdom will do. She will give and she will deliver the gift of wisdom to the young man/lover because she kept him and preserved him. As a result, a crown of glory shall be placed on him. If the woman of wisdom is embraced then she will honor in turn those who enfold her in their arms. But most of all, the woman of wisdom, gives to those who possess her a “fair garland” and a “beautiful crown”. A fair garland is most likely a wreath that points to some honorable state on achievement. While a “beautiful crown” is either figurative of honor (Proverbs 12:4, 14:24, 16:31, 17:6, Isaiah 62:3 on a symbol of royal status and Jeremiah 13:18). The aspiring sage who obtains wisdom will be held in high esteem and acquire a noble state.⁴⁸

New Testament

“His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover and when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.

⁴⁷ Loder, *Proverbs 1-9*, 206.

⁴⁸ Perdue, *Proverbs*, 114.

When they had finished the days, as they returned the boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem and Joseph and his mother did not know it (Lk. 2:41-43).

Luke's twelve-year old Jesus was not only obedient to God's will, he established himself as a true Israelite, from birth brought up in the moral and ritual life of Judaism. Home, temple and synagogue formed Jesus and at every significant period of his life he was in continuity with Judaism. Those periods for a first-born male child were circumcision at eight days; dedication or presentation to God, in this case at six weeks when his mother was purified; bar mitzvah at age twelve; and public life at age thirty.⁴⁹

The law of Moses required pilgrimages for Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14), but for people at a distance, only the Passover. Jesus is twelve years old, and if he has already gone through the ceremony of bar mitzvah ("son of the law") then he is obeying the command to attend Passover. When the seven-day festival ends, pilgrims from Galilee return home. In such a caravan, it is not surprising that a boy among relatives and friends would be missed for a day. The reactions of the parents are natural, both in the search and in the reprimand.⁵⁰

The Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem is made in conformity to the custom. In verse 41, "his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover and in verse 42 "according to the custom of the feast". For Jesus, this was a regular religious practice which also involved a sense of obligation. It is also clear from Deuteronomy 16:16 that adult males were supposed to go to Jerusalem for the Passover, though it is difficult to know how widely the practice was observed in the first century. Jesus will

⁴⁹ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke Interpretation: Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 41.

⁵⁰ Craddock, *Luke Interpretation*, 41.

not enter Jerusalem again in Luke's gospel until the Passover season of his royal entry into the city, cleansing the temple, teaching in it (Luke 19:28-48).⁵¹

“Joseph and his mother” are referred to as his parents, which stresses the bond of a familial household. It seems strange that Jesus would leave his parents without informing them, when he must have known that they were about to leave for home. However, persons destined for greatness do unusual things from time to time as they also display an unusual ability at an early age. The age of twelve is also an early beginning of wisdom and is associated with Cyrus, Epicurus, Samuel, Moses, Solomon, Daniel, David and others. At the age of thirteen a Jewish boy becomes a “son of the law” i.e., personally responsible for keeping the commandments. This Lukan pericope may possibly therefore suggest that Jesus' parents wanted to introduce him to the festival. On the other hand, children were supposed to be brought along as soon as they could walk or even be carried although this probably applies only to those who lived in Jerusalem.⁵²

Luke's story of the twelve-year old Jesus in the temple provides a first indication that Jesus is aware of his special mission and hints at the conflict between that mission and his family expectations.⁵³ Luke 2:41-52 describes Jesus' hidden years between his infancy and baptism in Luke 3:21-22 NKJV “when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while he prayed, the heaven was opened, and the

⁵¹ David L. Tiede, *Luke: Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 43.

⁵² Edward Schweizen, *The Good News According to Luke* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1984), 42.

⁵³ Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke: Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 78.

holy spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven which said, you are my beloved son; in you I am well pleased.”

This pericope sits awkwardly at the end of Luke 1-2. In structure, content, and style the passage seems to be a tag-on. One of the problems with this pericope is that the closing incident seems tacked onto the rest of the story. It dangles. Scholars have worked hard to make it work in parallel to something else within the infancy passages, but it will not match up. All attempts seem forced, like trying to fit a puzzle piece from a different puzzle. Luke 2:40 “and the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him” prepares us for Jesus’ adult ministry, but instead we get this story.⁵⁴

The pericope in Luke 2:41-52 is not the fulfillment of anything that precedes. Indeed, it conflicts with what precedes. Here, Joseph is called Jesus’ father and Mary and Joseph seem dismayed by what happens with their son Jesus at the temple. They act surprised as if the notion of Jesus calling God “father” is a new concept in verse 49. And he said to them, “why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my fathers’ business?”⁵⁵ Brown observes that such “hidden-life” stories do serve a purpose. They deal with the issue of when Jesus became the Christ. Hidden-life stories show that he was God’s son even as a boy, by having him work miracles just as he does in ministry, and by having him speak in the high Christological language of the ministry.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Karen Chakoian, “Luke 2:41-52,” *Interpretation* 52, no. 2 (April 1998): 185.

⁵⁵ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary of The Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Company, 1977), 480.

⁵⁶ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 481.

Brown notes one obvious function of this pericope: bridging between the infant Jesus and his adult ministry. “Young adult” stories about great men, were often included in biographies, typically the incidents occurred between the ages of ten and fourteen and included reference to both the person’s wisdom and life work. A twelve or thirteen Jesus would have moved into the Jewish age of responsibility. Although this is not a bar mitzvah, Jesus has “come to age”, and he might well go to Jerusalem for a blessing. Whether he is now personally responsible for observing the Passover is probably not important, but here he has taken his place and found his own voice. Jesus speaks for the first time, and it is suitably at the temple.⁵⁷

Jesus was not only great from the beginning; but what was outstanding about Jesus at the age of twelve years old is his extraordinary knowledge, and it is this which makes him as exceptional. An extraordinary knowledge of the law; ability to teach those far more experienced, and profound wisdom are often projected back into the childhood lives of important Old Testament figures by contemporary literature. Moses is attributed with superior understanding as a child. Josephus says of himself that at age fourteen he had acquired knowledge of the law superior to that of high priests and other men of the city. Samuel is said to have commenced prophecy at age twelve. In fact, Samuel the blessed son is characterized by a story in which he is clothed year after year in a succession of priestly robes, custom-sown by his mother, suited to his growing stature.⁵⁸

The boy Samuel was given to God by his mother Hannah, and in time Samuel was taken to live in the temple. It was in the temple that Samuel came to an awareness of his

⁵⁷ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 481.

⁵⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1999), 34.

special mission. And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men”. (1 Samuel 2:26).

Samuel’s growth in “stature and in favor” is remarkable enough to call for comment, for coordinated growth in size and sanctity is uncommon. Most of us get bigger without getting better. But growth has as much to do with the soul as it does with the body. There can be growth in “favor” as well as in “stature”. If we are going to be truly human, there must be. It is significant that a thousand years later Luke uses similar words to describe both John the Baptizer (Luke 1:80) and Jesus the Christ (Luke 2:40) and (Luke 2:52). There is not true growth that does not embrace both human and God relationships. Samuel, John and Jesus in their different ways provide this pattern.⁵⁹

At the age of twelve years old, Jesus was a boy who was obedient to the laws and came from a family for whom obedience to the law was a way of life. In this; Jesus’ family fulfilled the Jewish ideal which believed the family functions to include propagating the race, satisfying emotional needs in beneficent ways, and perpetuating religious experiences. Jesus’ family practiced the following proverb: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).⁶⁰

Despite Jesus’ obedience to the law; Jesus was partially disobedient to his parents because Jesus challenged his parent’s authority and was strong enough to assert his own individuality. Jesus stayed behind not out of willful disobedience, but out of curiosity, and to take advantage of the novel opportunity of being able to hear the great Jewish teachers. Some parents would probably punish or ground Jesus for a long time. What a

⁵⁹ Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 35.

⁶⁰ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (Danvers, MA: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), 36.

great excuse Jesus had; he wasn't hanging out with friends playing videogames; instead Jesus was talking with teachers in the temple. Like other twelve-year old boys, he was perhaps forgetful of time, and this thrilling moment made Jesus forget that his parents might be wondering what had happened to him.⁶¹

In trying to understand the fundamental message of this pericope; the reader must be careful not to over analyze Joseph and Mary's lack of awareness of Jesus absence, or Jesus' consciousness of his absence from his parents. For instance, how could Joseph and Mary start off on a long journey to Galilee from Jerusalem without making sure that their twelve-year old was in tow? Or how could they have gone a whole day's journey without realizing that he was not with them? Or would they have been traveling separately, in groups of men and women? The Gospel of Luke tries to answer this in verse 44a as the Bible states that: "supposing him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances."

Another area of this pericope that the reader must be careful not to over analyze takes place in verse 46a where the Bible states that: "now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple". Yes, Jesus is in the temple among the teachers but it is not clear whether Luke is counting three days from their departure from Jerusalem, their discovery that Jesus was missing, or their return to Jerusalem. Some interpreters find here an allusion to the resurrection, but the connection is not obvious and the formula "after three days" does not appear elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke.⁶²

⁶¹ G. H. P. Thompson, *The Gospel According to Luke in the Revised Standard Version* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1972), 73.

⁶² *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 9 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 77.

Or how did Jesus spend the nights in between, until he was found? Where did he spend them? How could he have acted so irresponsibly towards his parents, if he were gifted with such striking comprehension, as verse 47 suggests where the Bible states that “and all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers”? To ask such questions is to miss the whole point of this pericope. In Luke 2:50, the Bible states: “but they did not understand the statement which he spoke to them.” This is the Gospel of Luke’s way of getting across to his readers the difficulty of understanding who Jesus is or was.⁶³

In verse 48, “when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, “son, why have you done this to us? Look, your father and I have sought you anxiously.” The parent’s amazement, astonishment and failure to understand takes on a different meaning than these emotions did in the previous verse, 47. It is a little surprising that the mother should speak on behalf of both parents. Also, here in verse 48, finally Jesus’ parents seem to be preoccupied in not only his reappearance; but also, his parents seem to finally be interested in what Jesus must say for himself.

Amazement, astonishment, and a failure to understand are reoccurring themes in the Gospel of Luke. In Luke 8:56 the parents of the raised child “were amazed”, In Luke 24:22 Cleopas says that the women who went to the tomb “amazed us”. (In Acts people are amazed at Pentecost [2:7, 12], at Paul [9:21], at what happens in Cornelius’ house [10:45], and at Peter’s deliverance [12:16]. The noun appears in Luke 5:26 “amazement (ekstasis) seized them all.” The parents “were astonished” (exeplesan). This verb reappears in 4:32 where people “were amazed” at the authority of Jesus’ word, and in

⁶³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 439.

9:43 where “all were astonished at the majesty of God” as Jesus restores a boy to his father. But amazement and astonishment are no yet understanding. The parents did not understand (sunekan) Jesus saying. On his final approach to Jerusalem, Jesus’ disciples do not understand the passion saying: “they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said” (18:34). But the risen Lord “opened their minds to understand” (24:25).⁶⁴

Another point in this pericope deals with Jesus’ response to his parents in verse 49, where the Bible states that: “and he said to them, why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business? Herein lies Jesus’ dual identity as Jesus appears to possess more of an allegiance to God than to his parents. Jesus officially calls a new family into existence. This Lukan pericope juxtaposed Jesus’ natural father with his heavenly father, Jesus’ original family with his new household. It stressed that Jesus’ vocation and ministry was officially now his overriding concern. Such a vocation and ministry cuts natural family ties and rejects other considerations. Despite all of their caring and worrying, Jesus’ parents did not understand the event of which Jesus spoke to them. As is typical in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ pronouncements about his vocation and ministry meet with misunderstanding: “But they understood none of these things; this event/saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said” (18:34). The Gospel of Luke has softened the emphasis in the tradition on the misunderstanding of the disciples by stressing that “it was concealed from them” (9:45).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Laurentin, *Jesus au Temple*, 403.

⁶⁵ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, “Luke 2:41-52,” *Interpretation* 36, no. 4 (Oct. 1982): 401.

The use of the father title for God by Jesus in Luke 2:49 should be seen within this context. It does not affirm patriarchal fatherhood but stands in criticism of it and against it. Whereas Mary complained how much she and Jesus' father were worried about his absence, Jesus rebukes her: They should have known that he was concerned with his father's affairs. The father, symbol for God, relativizes all claims of earthly fatherhood and rejects all power of a patriarch ally institutionalized society. Today, feminist theology has raised the challenging questions whether the use of the father-symbol for God functions to strengthen the patriarchal internalization and socialization process insofar as children internalize very early the notion that God is male and not female, father and not mother.

Finally, verse 52 states that: "and Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." This entire verse strongly echoes 1 Samuel 2:26 and requires Jesus to balance between growing in wisdom, height, and favor with God and humankind.⁶⁶ Jesus is already well advanced in knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. This pericope makes it clear that Jesus fulfilled his commandment to honor his father and his father while simultaneously growing in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God as he would not begin in public ministry until he was about thirty years old. Luke 3:23 states that: "now Jesus himself began his ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli.

⁶⁶ John Nolland, *World Biblical Commentary*, vol. 35B (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1999).

Summary

One of the challenges with these two pericopes will be for me as to determine whether I am seeking young black males to achieve religiously and/or just academically? A second challenge is for me to define “achievement”? What is “achievement”, and how will I measure the achievement of the young black males within my context at my relatively new context at Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church? Third, with a prevalence of absentee-fatherhood within my study group of young black males at my local church context; how will their void impact their ability to “draw near to God so He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this historical foundations' paper, I will write that W.E.B. Dubois was one of the most significant educational thinkers of the twentieth century and that his many works and educational views have much relevance to eliminating the educational achievement gap of young black males. I will also attempt to place DuBois's thinking within the historical context of the Progressive Era which took place from 1890 to 1920. Additionally, the DuBois reflection of the "Talent Tenth" will be discussed as well as the DuBois and Washington controversy. Each of these topics of discussion will assist in the shaping of the doctoral project of "Closing the Educational Achievement Gap of Young Black Males Eleven to Seventeen Who Live in Single Parent Households."

Filled with great ambition and equipped with degrees from some of the world's most prestigious institutions, DuBois was ready to take his place in history as the "Moses" of his people. He saw himself as the "chosen one" whose mission was to lead the Negro people out of the social, economic, and political bondage of a Jim Crow society and out of a state of hopelessness resulting from hundreds of years of enslavement. Young and naïve, he was not prepared for what he would see as he looked over the mountaintop into "Canaan" to embark on his great mission. Nor did he totally understand the complexity and resilience of American prejudice and race hatred, or the deeply embedded views of Negro inferiority.

William Edward Burghardt DuBois (1868-1963) was born in the small New England town of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, he showed his intellectual talent as a writer for newspapers such as the *New York Age*, *New York Globe*, and *Springfield Republican*.¹ From 1885-1888, he attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where he received a B.A. degree. In 1888, he entered Harvard University as a junior rather than a graduate student because Harvard would not fully accept his Fisk degree as an undergraduate degree. He graduated cum laude from Harvard in 1895.

Between 1892 and 1894, DuBois attended graduate school at the University of Berlin, studying history and economics. He returned to the United States in 1894, where he pursued his doctoral studies and in 1895 became the first Negro to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard.²

The world that the young DuBois, a self-proclaimed “Moses”, entered during the final decade of the nineteenth century was in a turbulent state of change. Increased immigration, rapid industrialization, migration from farms to cities, and massive overcrowding in urban centers brought an array of problems to the United States, including increased poverty, crime, and social and industrial instability. Within this context, DuBois adopted and adapted the ethos of Progressivism to address the social,

¹ David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. DuBois: Biography of a Race 1868-1919* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1993), 39; W. E. B. DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1940), 13.

² W. E. B. DuBois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1968), 107, 125, 155.

economic, and political problems of black people, or what was widely referred to as the “Negro Problem.”³

Drawn from DuBois’s landmark sociological study *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), “What Is The Negro Problem?” replies to the late-nineteenth century white preoccupation with the supposed liabilities of the “Negro Problem” by focusing on the economic and political causes of African American impoverishment, unemployment, and broken families. In DuBois view, both whites and blacks have parts to play in improving opportunities for African Americans in the urban North, the focus of his study.⁴ The Negro Problem, it has often been said, is largely a problem of ignorance – not simply of illiteracy, but a deeper ignorance of the world and its ways, of the thought and experience of men; an ignorance of self and possibilities of human souls. This can be gotten rid of only by training; and primarily such training must take the form of that sort of social leadership which we call education.⁵

Ignorance seems to be widespread and when there are few homes and public institutions to supplement the work of the school. It is, therefore, of crying necessity among Negroes that the heads of their educational system – the teachers in the normal schools, the heads of high schools, the principals of public systems, should be unusually well trained men; men trained not simply in common-school branches, not simply in the technique of school management and normal methods, but trained beyond this, broadly

³ George Washington Cable, “The Negro Question,” in the *The Negro Question: A Selection of Writings on Civil Rights in the South* by George Washington Cable, ed. Arlin Turner (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), 121.

⁴ Eric J. Sundquist, *The Oxford W. E. B. Dubois Reader* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 344.

⁵ Sundquist, *The Oxford W. E. B. Dubois Reader*, 355.

and carefully, into the meaning of the age whose civilization it is their peculiar duty to interpret to the youth of a new race, to the minds of untrained people. Such educational leaders should be prepared by long and rigorous courses of study similar to those which the world over have been designed to strengthen the intellectual powers, fortify character, and facilitate the transmission from age to age of the stores of the world's knowledge.⁶

The very first step toward the settlement of the Negro problem is the spread of intelligence. But spread of intelligence alone will not solve the Negro problem. If this problem is largely a question of ignorance, it is also scarcely less a problem of poverty. If Negroes are to assume the responsibility of raising the standards of living among themselves, the power of intelligent work and leadership toward proper industrial ideals must be placed in their hands. Economic efficiency depends on intelligence, skill, and thrift. The public-school system is designed to furnish the necessary intelligence for the ordinary worker, the secondary school for the more gifted workers, and the college for the exceptional few.⁷

DuBois was not seeking to minimize the vast efforts put forth for Negro education in the United States; he was simply pointing out that, great as those efforts have been, they are strikingly inadequate, and that under present conditions the majority of Negro children are growing up in ignorance, and without proper moral and intellectual leadership of adequately trained teachers, ministers, and heads of families.

The late 1800s through the early 1900s, commonly known as the Progressive Era in U.S. History, was a time when many middle-class white Americans tried to make

⁶ Sundquist, *The Oxford W. E. B. Dubois Reader*, 355-56.

⁷ Sundquist, *The Oxford W. E. B. Dubois Reader*, 357.

sense out of a new and more complex world. The period was an anxious one for middle-class whites, who more readily came into contact with various ethnic groups and the social problems facing American society.⁸

Historian Richard Hofstadter asserts that Progressivism called for “orderly social change” and that social reformers were not interested in bringing about a revolution. In his view, Progressives believed that humans were innately good and that social reform, not a complete overhaul of society, was the best means to improve American society. Progressives’ main objective, therefore, was to change existing institutions and create new ones to improve social life. Such improvements, they believed, would occur through institutional change, progressive social rhetoric, efficiency-based strategies, scientific investigation, and community-based development.⁹

Historian Lynn Gordon similarly argues that the Progressive Era was a period of “optimisms and energy” that prevailed middle-class America. Progressives exuded confidence that human beings could ameliorate the deficiencies of national life, while remaining within a traditional framework.”¹⁰

Progressivism also influenced the U.S. educational system. Historian Lawrence Cremin argued that Progressive education emerged from the larger Progressive movement and described it as a “many sided effort to use the schools to improve the lives of individuals.” According to Cremin, Progressive education extolled (a) a broad program that addressed issues related to “health, vocation, and the quality of family and

⁸ Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Movement, 1900-1915* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 1-15.

⁹ Hofstadter, *The Progressive Movement*, 1-15.

¹⁰ Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 34.

community life”; (b) application in the classroom of pedagogical principles based on scientific research, psychology, and the social sciences; (c) differentiated curricula to fit the needs of children of various classes and backgrounds; and (d) democratic ideas that everyone could succeed.¹¹

No study of educational reform during the Progressive Era time period would be complete without a discussion of perhaps its most enlightened element: the movement to transform the schools into community centers. The idea was simple enough and fully in keeping with the best of pedagogical thought during the era: from the limited function of educating children, the school should be expanded into a broad-based community center. Its facilities could thus be used both day and night; its efficiency would thereby be improved due to its increased utilization, and it would serve in a multiplicity of functions: high school, gymnasium, meeting hall, lecture hall, etc. In addition, it would become not only an agency of democratization but would better make opportunities open to all and help break down the barriers of wealth and social position.¹²

Such progressive educational ideas, along with the growing ethnic diversity of the country, impacted black education during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Blacks continued to view education as a means to improve their social and economic plight where other initiatives had failed. Many black and white educators believed that the system of universal schooling that blacks helped to advance during Reconstruction would

¹¹ Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 167.

¹² John Dewey, *The School and Social Progress* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1900), 63.

prepare blacks for the mammoth social, economic, industrial, and agriculture changes that occurred in the United States after the Civil War.

Northern industrialists and Southerners who were not necessarily Progressives recognized the necessity of a unified economic North and South to take advantage of industrialization. Moreover, many believed it was necessary to develop a reliable labor source for Northern industry and Southern agriculture. As a result, a number of Northern industrialists and Southerners advocated for industrial and agricultural education and schooling that would train blacks to become laborers and workers.¹³

Between 1890 and 1910, 90% of all blacks were located in the rural South where they made up 1/3 of that region's population. The United States Census reported an increase during the period from seven and a half million to almost ten million blacks. In 1910, blacks constituted 10.7% of the total American Population, and census statistics indicated that illiteracy among blacks had decreased by 20%. Along with racial exclusion the high level of illiteracy was probably an important factor holding blacks in agricultural and menial occupations. Approximately three-fifths of all black wage earners were literate in 1890, and seven out of eight of these received subsistence wages for work in the fields or menial service occupations. More than one hundred and twenty thousand of those blacks listed as farm workers in the 1890 census owned their own farms.¹⁴

¹³ William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2002), 65.

¹⁴ William Loren Katz, *Negro Population in the United States 1870-1915* (New York, NY: Arno and the New York Times, 1968), 33; Lorenzo J. Greene and Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Wage Earner* (New York, NY: Russell and Russell, 1969), 46.

Of the more than one million blacks in the labor market in 1890, approximately two hundred thousand worked in unskilled mechanical and manufacturing pursuits in the South. About one percent of the total black labor force was engaged in manufacturing pursuits outside the South and this number accounted for between eight and ten percent of all black wage earners in those regions. While most blacks employed in trade and transportation in 1890 were in the South, this category also accounted for ten percent of the black labor force in the North. Blacks who lived outside the South in the 1890s fared somewhat better where, for the most part, they were employed in menial and service occupations.¹⁵

In proportion to their numbers in the population, many more blacks in the North and West were able to locate employment in trade, transportation and industrial settings. Just over one percent of the black work force in 1890 was engaged in the professions. Most of them lived in the South and practiced among their own people. About one-half of all black professionals were employed in teaching and related fields, while some twelve thousand were in the clergy. Among the other occupations listed, there were large numbers of musicians and music teachers, actors, professional entertainers or government officials. Less than one thousand were physicians and surgeons.¹⁶

The heightening of hostile treatment and laws enacted against blacks in the period were largely responsible for the marked decline of blacks in skilled and semi-skilled occupations. There was also a sharp drop in opportunity for apprenticeships and industrial training of blacks, and employment in the developing industries in the South

¹⁵ Katz, *Negro Population*, 36-42.

¹⁶ Katz, *Negro Population*, 44-45.

was reserved primarily for poor whites. In the North foreign immigrants fought against blacks for industrial jobs, and they had widespread support of non-immigrant whites. Lack of capital, experience, and training kept large numbers of Negroes out of business, and the bulk of Negro workers remained confined largely to an agricultural South where they were employed in domestic and personal service as sharecroppers and field hands. By 1910, however, there was an increase in black owner-operated farms as a result of efforts made by the Negro leadership which encouraged blacks to remain on the farm and to own the land they cultivated.¹⁷

The state of black public and private schooling during the late 1800s and early 1900s reflected both promise and problems. African Americans made significant strides in literacy, rising from a rate of 42 percent in 1890 to 81 percent in 1930. Historian Henry Bullock attributes this impressive increase in literacy to the many private schools opened after the Civil War. This explanation has been buttressed by historians Ronald Butchart and James Anderson, who have also documented the prevalence of black educational agency in the development of private black schools and Sabbath (church-sponsored) schools during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Similarly, between 1870 and 1900 black enrollment in colleges increased significantly. For instance, in 1876, 137 blacks graduated from black colleges and by 1900, 1,883 blacks had graduated from black colleges.¹⁸

¹⁷ Katz, *Negro Population*, 50.

¹⁸ Henry A. Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South, from 1619 to Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 172-173. Note that Bullock stresses that these were black college students who graduated under a college-level curriculum. Also see Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction*, 167-179, and Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 10-17.

Despite such gains, a number of issues hindered the overall progress of African American education. African Americans, for instance, typically had a shorter school term than whites, which contributed to lower levels of achievement among black youth.¹⁹

In addition, black schools tended to receive less funding than white schools, which resulted in inadequate heating, poor lighting, holes in the floor, leaky roofs, and too few desks for the students. In addition, black teachers were paid substantially lower salaries than white teachers. Such institutional racism persisted throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century and resulted in high teacher-pupil ratios, overcrowded classes, irregular student attendance, and deplorable work conditions in many schools.²⁰

The educational picture was correspondingly bleak. Though persons of school age constituted one third of the total black population in 1899, less than one-half of them were in regular school attendance. U.S. Office of Education statistics reported in *The Negro Common School* that of Negro children enrolled, only about one-third were in regular attendance in the different Southern states in 1899. School terms in the southern states might have as many as 188 days (Maryland) or as few as sixty-two (Alabama). Summarizing the dilemma of Negro education, DuBois wrote the following comment. “In other words, one-third of the Negro children of school age in the United States are attending regularly a school lasting usually less than five months a year. Thus, Negro

¹⁹ As an example, in 1911, *The Common School and the Negro American* reported that in the years 1909-1910 the Negro school term was an average of 101 days a year compared to 128 days for white students. Black students were frequently excused from school to work on farms to help satisfy labor demands during harvest seasons. As a result, the prevalence of sharecropping among blacks played a mitigating role in their negative school attendance. See W. E. B. DuBois, *The Common School and the Negro American* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University Press, 1911). Also see Bullock, *A History of Negro Education*, 175-177.

²⁰ Bullock, *A History of Negro Education*, 180; Michael Fultz, “African American Teachers in the South, 1890-1940: Powerless and the Ironies of Expectations and Protest,” *History of Education Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 404.

children need about five times as much school training as they at present receive. This state of affairs points clearly to two great needs: Better schools and compulsory attendance.”²¹

In the South, black opportunities for schooling were severely limited by the demand of agricultural pursuits and white opposition to providing blacks with education. As a result the education of black children in southern public schools was primarily supported by the contributions of their parents and community organizations. By 1900 just over two thousand blacks had graduated from institutions of higher learning in the United States.²²

In 1900 there were thirty-four institutions of higher education for blacks, of which eleven offered a four-year college course. Industrial education was much more available to blacks than higher education, and it received more generous support from philanthropy. Ninety-eight schools offered industrial education to more than fifteen thousand students in 1899. Only eight of the thirty-four black colleges did not offer courses in industrial training. Nevertheless, the great potential for education and social development inherent in the black population was exemplified by the few blacks who made outstanding careers of their professions and literary and creative pursuits.²³

DuBois was initially concerned that blacks would have access to the educational opportunities they needed to prepare them for life in modern industrial society. He recognized the importance of the relationship that existed between the way American

²¹ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Negro Common School*, The Atlanta University Publications, ed. William Loren Katz (reprint, New York, NY: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 84-85.

²² DuBois, *The Negro Common School*, 86-91.

²³ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Negro Artisan*, The Atlanta University Publications, ed. William Loren Katz (reprint, New York, NY: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 66-68.

society was organized and the kinds of educational opportunities made available to blacks. He also saw the importance of education to the preservation of black peoples' African cultural heritage, and he connected their plight in America with the similar struggles of dark-skinned people in other parts of the world. The important shifts in DuBois educational prescriptions are related to his perceptions of the significant changes that took place in American society and the world in his lifetime. DuBois recognized the impact that these events had upon black people, and this awareness played an important part in the evolution of his thought. In time, his views on education were deeply influenced by the political philosophy of Socialism, which he applied in his assessment of blacks' situation in America.

Culture, leadership and higher education are major themes throughout DuBois' writings on education. In the early years he called for college trained blacks to devote their energies to the service of the black masses through the development of an elite leadership class; "*The Talented Tenth*" to carry out what he believed was the duty of the Negro aristocracy to lift the black majority to white culture.

DuBois conception of the Talented Tenth emerged as a consequence of the continuing deterioration of the condition of the American Negro during the latter part of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century. It also developed as a counterforce to the growing impact of industrial education thrust advocated by Booker T. Washington. By 1903, DuBois crystallized his position with the publication of *Souls of Black Folk*.

In this book, which is a series of essays on various aspects of the Negro problem, DuBois referred to the "two-warring ideals" in the "double-consciousness" of Black people. One of these "warring ideals" was the racist notion that Blacks were not human,

or were not fully so, and that they did not even exist. Blacks countered that perverse ideal with a healthy one of their own: in their own heads they were human, they existed, and they had human worth and dignity. As DuBois said, it took “dogged strength” on Black people’s part to keep this intellectual/psychological struggle from tearing their psyches asunder.²⁴

Furthermore, DuBois included an essay entitled “*Of Mr. Booker T. Washington*” in which DuBois clearly pointed out that Washington’s insistence on an accommodation first philosophy of racial adjustment between blacks and whites and his almost inclusive emphasis on large scale industrial education for Negro people were abetting the white establishment in creating a caste system for black people.²⁵ This, Washington, he claimed, failed to see or would not see.

The “controversy” between DuBois and Washington was now in full view. Both intellectual giants claimed adherents and severely criticized each other. The end of the controversy was not to be until 1915 with death of Washington. The philosophies of the two men are important to this historical foundation paper because they both raised a fundamental question which is: “*What education is most appropriate for a people recently joining the community of a free society?*” For Washington the answer was industrial education. For DuBois it was the selection of students with higher ability for advanced training in college. Therefore, these two intellectual giants created two distinct educational philosophies early in the twentieth century which affected black people.

²⁴ W. D. Wright, *Crisis of the Black Intellectual* (Chicago, IL: Third World Press, 2007), 236.

²⁵ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Dood Mezmland, 1903), 31-33.

The conflict between the philosophies of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois was not that irreconcilable as some believed. Both men recognized the merit in each other's position. It was the potentialities inherent in each philosophy that posed the real problem; this is where the rivalry developed: Washington supporters consisted of white southerners and northern philanthropists, while DuBois followers feared the industrial education that Washington proposed would result in the continued isolation of the Black from the broad stream of American culture.

The controversy between these two men seems to have a negative effect on the development of a well-rounded system of education for the Black. Also, the proper preparation for careers and full citizenship in a free society was delayed for the Black.²⁶

Concerning the education of blacks, DuBois called for excellence especially mastery of the sciences and humanities, he also wanted special attention given to economics and mathematics. DuBois believed education was a life-long process not something you acquire in a few years. He viewed education as a process which teaches certain central values such as a nurturing of love for beauty, a concern for courtesy, moderation and an ability to endure. Education should be the builder of character in the youth, according to DuBois. Through his writings DuBois transmits a sense of pride in his people, thus always insisting that Blacks have control over their own lives.²⁷

Thinking as an historian, DuBois argued that if the Negro race were to succeed; then the Negro race must follow the example of other successful races. DuBois

²⁶ Clift Anderson, *Negro Education in America* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1962), 190-191.

²⁷ W. E. B. Dubois, *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques 1906-1960*, ed. with introduction by Herbert Aptheker (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), x-xii.

elaborated on this in a statement published in 1903 which stated that: *“the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the best of this race that they may guide the mass away from the contamination and death of the worst, in their own and other races.”*²⁸

DuBois was quick to recognize the difficult and intricate task of training men and was quite willing to leave the technical problems in operationalizing educational techniques to educational experts. However, in the establishment of goals and the setting up of objectives or aims for education these were to be left to the seers or the statesmen with educational foresight and vision.²⁹

DuBois even went further by stating that: *“If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men. Men, we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools – intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it – this is the curriculum of that higher education which must underlie true life. On this foundation we may build bread winning, skill of hand and quickness of brain, with never a fear lest the child and man mistake the means of living for the object of life.”*³⁰

In summary, as I bring to light DuBois’s educational thought I realize that this is not a simple task. Studying the educational thought of such a complex thinker as DuBois

²⁸ Francis L. Broderick and August Meier, *Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965), 41.

²⁹ Broderick and Meier, *Negro Protest Thought*, 41.

³⁰ Broderick and Meier, *Negro Protest Thought*, 41.

presents a number of dilemmas and challenges. DuBois lived such a long life and wrote across so many disciplines and produced such an extensive body of written work it is difficult to nail down his exact educational ideas. DuBois has been called an Afro-centrist, and a Euro-centrist, a radical and an accommodationist, an integrationist and a separatist, and a capitalist and a socialist.³¹ However, it is certain that DuBois recognized the importance of addressing the importance of improving an inferior status plus improving the education in black life.

³¹ Derrick P. Alridge, *The Educational Thought of W. E. B. DuBois: An Intellectual History* (New York, NY: Teachers College, 2008), 6.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this theological foundations' chapter, I will investigate the theological theme of Black Liberation Theology, the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the Movement of Pentecostalism. All three constructs working together with all of their individual strengths and individual weaknesses are still necessary in order to close the educational achievement gap of young black males who live in a single parent household. As leaders and churches embrace and understand the collaborative efforts of the three constructs working together, a change can possibly occur.

A growing issue in black churches concerns the failure to empower, protect, nurture, train, motivate, and educate young black males. Further, when conducting research, there is a noticeable gap in theological reference to the youth, young adults and especially young black males. There are other factors that play a role in the educational achievement gap such as violence and crime. Violence and crime are characterized by unfulfilled potential, incarceration, and or early death. Therefore, closing the educational achievement gap of young black males who live in a single parent household is one way to fight against the damaging impact these risks have within my relatively new ministry context of Rahway, New Jersey.

Given the precarious existence of many young black males in the United States and across the globe; one critical question that to be addressed in this theological chapter

is “in what ways can black theologians and practical theologians work with black churches to engage, encourage, empower, and educate young black males to break the cycles of violence and crime?”¹

Until the rise of James Cone, J. Deotis Roberts, Dwight Hopkins and others, historically black theologians have not given much attention to the topic of children, notwithstanding young black males. Within the Roman Catholic theological tradition, as well as other sacramental traditions, the child is a subject of critical reflection. That is, in those traditions one can find a theology of childhood. From Karl Rahner to new voices such as David Jensen, childhood has received sustained and critical theological attention. The same is not true in black theology. This is to say not that theological reflection on children are not found within black religious traditions but that these reflections have not been among the basic affirmations of faith within black religious communities. Together, black pastors, practitioners, and theologians must work to fashion a theological perspective on childhood that will shield them from the variety of exploitations that threaten their very lives.²

Black liberation theology is an effort of African American people to claim their blackness and their freedom as people of God. Freedom comes when black poor folk, led by the African American church, live out their freedom because God helps them in their daily struggle against personal pain and collective oppression.³ This is how Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. taught black liberation theology. In addition, a liberation

¹ Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith Jr., *Black Practical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 17.

² Andrews and Smith Jr., *Black Practical Theology*, 38-39.

³ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 4-5.

movement needs to free black minds from self-hate and subordination to white power. Malcolm X preached this lesson when he said to his African American audience: the greatest tragedy of black people is when they accept the standards of white beauty and actively avoid their black and African cultures.⁴ Today race still matters in the United States. W.E.B. DuBois's profound words continue to echo throughout the land – the problem of the century remains the color line, the color line for poor and working-class black folk.⁵ To be an African American means an experience of anti-black racism.⁶ But it also means the joy and beauty of celebrating the intellectual and spiritual gifts of black folk.⁷

Within the black context, the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit began at the dawning of the era of slavery, captured West African peoples in the New World (of North and Latin America and the Caribbean) joined their voices in shouts, moans, and deep groaning of their inner spirit. Calling on God's Spirit to manifest itself, they looked for a release from captivity and bondage.⁸ This Spirit-induced frenzy was not always welcomed by all black folk, especially in the early nineteenth century. Eminent Christian physician

⁴ Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology*, 5.

⁵ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1968), 23.

⁶ Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), 47.

⁷ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, and in his *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 1970)

⁸ Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio, *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 111.

Martin Delaney derided many black churches for what he believed to be their spirituality of excessive otherworldliness and crude imitation of white church moralism.⁹

When turning to the Movement of Pentecostalism; Nils Bloch-Hoell's 1964 study asserted: When the Pentecostal movement came into being a great deal of the U.S.A. must have been spiritually and socially rootless. "Three mutually connected elements converged to bring this about: The mass immigration, the industrial organization and the enormous growth of the cities at the expense of the agrarian districts".¹⁰ The three elements of immigration, industrialization, and urbanization in the late-nineteenth-century America, the concomitant rise of class prejudice, and the weakening of traditional forms of authority created a sense of "rootlessness" in the lower classes, spurred a radical and reactionary return to primitive Christianity while simultaneously seeking the democratization of the Christian churches.¹¹ Block-Hoell thus concludes, "The Pentecostal Movement [sic] was, and to a certain extent is, a class movement, the primitive Christianity of the less educated."¹²

From its origin in 1966 to the early 1980s, contemporary black theology developed under the bold, misunderstood, and radical leadership of the first generation of pastors, critical thinkers and intellectuals. Some of these movers and shakers had to fight for the right of the African American church and surrounding community to think theologically, to engage in their own systematic approach to and criticism of faith

⁹ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 3rd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 136.

¹⁰ Nils Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement: Its Origins, Development, and Distinctive Character* (London, UK: Allen and Unwin, 1964), 9.

¹¹ Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement*, 9-13.

¹² Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement*, 11.

statements.¹³ Before the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (1966) and James H. Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969); the connection of black religious experience with serious intellectual implications for all of society was considered comic relief if not ignored by the white mainstream.

From the 1980s until the present, younger African American pastors, critical thinkers, and intellectuals have branched out into a variety of black theological concerns. While they seek to further the first generation's pioneering approach and agenda, they also claim their own distinct approaches. Therefore, these second-generation theologians are both heirs to and distinct from contemporary black theological founders. But unlike the older black theologians who worked primarily from outside the mainstream and were connected to a larger social movement, younger scholars are part of the status quo and operate as individuals.¹⁴

The second generation of black theologians can follow and fulfill their vocational responsibilities by using a mixture of interpretations. The recognition of multiple differences within the African American community is a positive move long overdue. Yet the important deepening of difference borders on a failure to perceive a vital unifying fact. Racial discrimination still permeates North American culture. Therefore, a crucial thread that must continue to tie together all areas of study and perspectives is a clear focus on working-class people and the poor. The overwhelming majority in the African American church and community fall within these categories.¹⁵

¹³ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Heart and Head: Black Theology – Past, Present and Future* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002), 159.

¹⁴ Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 160.

¹⁵ Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 161.

Historically the African American church in America represented an authentic expression of Black Power. It grew out of the needs of Black people to glorify God and to affirm their own humanity, to find a sense of identity, to have something controlled by Black People, to form an institution whose express purpose would be to celebrate, preserve and enhance the integrity of Blackness under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, to be responsive to the needs of Black people and responsible to them. The historic step to separate from the White Church was the first clear call for Black Power.¹⁶

However, we confess that in recent times we have not lived up to our heritage, for we have not celebrated, preserved and enhanced the integrity of Blackness. Rather we have fallen prey to the dominance of White Society and have allowed the truth, meaningfulness and authenticity of the Black Church to be defamed by our easy acceptance of its goals, objectives and criteria for success. Therefore, the Black Church has unwittingly become a tool for our oppression, providing an easy vehicle for escape from the harsh realities of our own existence. This of necessity makes it impossible for us to be instruments of liberation which is our calling as Christians and particularly Black Christians.¹⁷

Unfortunately, some black churches have allowed the historical and theological identity of black faith to be forgotten partly because of their promotion of the art of preaching, entertainment of praise and worship, and raising of tithes and offerings to the exclusion of doing black theology. Few black Christians know or even care to know

¹⁶ Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, *Black Theology: A Document History, 1969-1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 46.

¹⁷ Wilmore and Cone, *Black Theology*, 46.

about the theological significance of Richard Allen's departure from St. George's Methodist Church or Bishop Henry M. Turner's proclamation that "God is a Negro."¹⁸

Theology provides a critical test for the church so as to determine whether its life and work are consistent with the person and work of Jesus Christ. If a church has no theologians, then it cannot be genuinely self-critical and thereby seek to overcome its shortcomings and weaknesses. Some Black churches have not encouraged the development of theology alongside their strong emphasis on preaching, entertainment of praise and worship, and raising of tithes and offerings. The unfortunate consequence of this failure is the absence of self-criticism and thus a loss of the churches' distinct religious identity.¹⁹

Theology is in some sense also a "local theology", that is, a system of thought that emerges from the interplay of the gospel, the church, and culture. Robert Screiter sees each of these elements as multifaceted²⁰ but basically the gospel is the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, and the church is the very presence of the Lord in any given community. The church has a double-lensed perspective: one eye is on the foundational traditions of faith, while the other eye is on the community and its culture, which comprises all the factors that make up the way of life for the people.²¹

When J. Deotis Roberts wrote his *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* book, he stated that black theologians should begin to state what they are for

¹⁸ Edwin Redkey, *Respect Black: The Writing and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1971).

¹⁹ James H. Cone, *My Soul Looks Back* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 70.

²⁰ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 4.

²¹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 4.

and not merely what they are against.²² Roberts' astute observation was clearly directed at James H. Cone's view of Black Liberation Theology, which Roberts believed devoted too much attention to criticizing white theology rather than focusing more on the challenges of the black religious experience.

In essence, Roberts feels that Cone prohibits intercommunication between black and white when he locates the ground of authority in the black community. In a puzzling two-sided position, Roberts is willing to affirm Cone's radical black theological position, but not his limitation of the ground of authority. Roberts feels that the "narrowness which Cone has sought to impose upon Black Liberation Theology must be rejected."²³ The main reason for rejecting such a narrow position is by Roberts' own admission, to make Black Liberation Theology more acceptable to white theologians, whom Roberts fears Cone has offended by his approach.

Roberts places himself at the opposite extreme from Cone when Roberts suggests that intercommunication is a necessary task of Black Liberation Theology to bring about reconciliation between blacks and whites. Clearly, Cone had been unable to move to this point because liberation is the guiding principle of his theology. Roberts, on the other hand, can agree with Cone that liberation is the guiding principle but goes a step further and adds a second principle of equal significance – reconciliation.²⁴ In one of Roberts' books, *A Black Political Theology*, Reconciliation is presented as the essence of the good news, though it must be in conjunction with liberation: "There can be no liberation

²² Cecil Wayne Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* (Nashville, TN: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1975), 123.

²³ Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, 133.

²⁴ Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, 135.

without reconciliation and no reconciliation without liberation.” Roberts directs his primary concern to the “whole” church of Jesus Christ and not just blacks. Roberts states: “The only Christian way in race relations is a liberating experience of reconciliation for the white oppressor as well as for the black oppressed”.²⁵

In other words, Roberts has his eyes towards all people in general, not just the Black Church specifically. Roberts believes that God is doing a new thing, a new work, a new creation which is bigger than the black church context. This newness of God will meet each person right where he or she is and will restore one’s brokenness and reconcile relationships. Black Liberation Theology affirms that there is nothing special about the English word “God” in itself. What is important is the dimension of reality it points. The word “God” is a symbol that opens up depths of reality in the world. If the symbol loses its power to point to the meaning of black liberation, then we must destroy it. Black Liberation Theology asks whether the word “God” has lost its liberating power. Must we say that as a meaningful symbol the word “God” is hopelessly dead and cannot be resurrected?²⁶

Oppressed and oppressors cannot possibly mean the same thing when they speak of God. The God of the oppressed is a God of revolution who breaks the chain of slavery. The oppressors’ God is a God of slavery and must be destroyed along with the oppressors. The question then, as black theology sees it, is not whether blacks believe in God, but whose God?

²⁵ J. Deotis Roberts, *A Black Political Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1974), 203.

²⁶ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 61.

Roberts goes even further and said that: “there has arisen most recently a crying need to interpret the spiritual dimensions of the Negro’s self-awareness in theological perspective”.²⁷ Furthermore, “the black man in the United States has undergone a certain kind of treatment which has produced a unique type of spiritual experience both personal and collective – an experience which deserves theological analysis and interpretation.”²⁸ Thus the theological task would be directly related to the experience of the people, seeking to determine what it means to be black and Christian in the United States.²⁹

In order to carry out a theological interpretation of the black religious experience and at the same time guard against a crisis of identity; Roberts makes clear that Black Liberation Theology provides its own context and language within the framework of the Black Church. The Black Church is viewed by Roberts as an extended family for blacks. Roberts whole heartedly agrees with W.E.B. DuBois that “the Negro church of today is the social center of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character.”³⁰

It was not until the seminal works of James H. Cone and J. Deotis Roberts that we find a positive critique of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In his first book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, we find Cone’s Christocentric elaboration of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Cone notes that the Holy Spirit is traditionally understood to be the third Person of the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. For his purpose, Cone claims that “God’s manifestation as Spirit is indispensable for a

²⁷ Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, 124.

²⁸ Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, 124.

²⁹ Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, 124.

³⁰ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York, NY: Dood Mezdland, 1903).

total picture of the Christian God.”³¹ Cone characterizes the Holy Spirit as: “the power of God at work in the world effecting in the life of his people his intended purposes.”³² Thus the power that is the Holy Spirit is an “active power”, the very “personal activity of God’s will.”³³

The person of the Holy Spirit takes no time for small talk but engages in rigorous social critique of the “fact” of evil that is racism. Those who follow this Holy Spirit are spiritually impelled to take that side of the sufferer of racism. Such taking sides – seeing the event of racism as an evil to be eradicated – is a radical act of “obedience unto death” for the Spirit-filled believer. Such radical obedience is an adequate determination of whether one is “possessed” of the Spirit or not.³⁴ Cone now makes a critical pivot in his thinking. Cone mentions that Black Power, while not “consciously seeking to be Christian, seems to be where there is trouble.”³⁵ To the extent that Black Power shows both its concern and desire to meet the needs of the oppressed black folk, so it fulfills the aim of doing and being the “work of God’s Spirit.”³⁶

However, J. Deotis Roberts not only considers his work to be *black church theology* rather than the *black liberation theology* of James Cone, but Roberts wants to investigate the relationship between the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and human liberation,

³¹ Hopkins and Antonio, *The Cambridge Companion*, 112.

³² James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1969), 57.

³³ Cone quotes Edward Schweitzer, *Bible Key Words*, vol. 3 (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 2.

³⁴ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 59.

³⁵ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 60.

³⁶ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 60.

and the connection between the *charismata* and personal and social transformation.³⁷

Roberts wants to correct the silence of liberation theologians on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.³⁸ For Roberts, the worship of most blacks is “satiated with the presence of the Holy Spirit”, on the other hand, the “worship of more cultured and educated blacks often suffers from the Spirit’s absence.”³⁹ Roberts finds both sides in need of more information and understanding. Both turn away from a concern for the “social, economic, and political aspects of liberation” that is so critical to genuine black church theology.⁴⁰

Roberts considers the role of the Holy Spirit in the church. Roberts notes that the church is the creation of the Spirit, both institutionally and as a community.⁴¹ As an institution, we are talking about structures, “established relationships and patterns of historical and social order.” As a community, we are speaking of the event that occurs within and between persons. Roberts insists that there is an interrelationship between the institution and the event of the church. The event of the church points us to the spontaneous, energizing human response to the activity of the Holy Spirit, as well as “the character of the community’s life of grace.”⁴²

The black church is both an event and an institution. In its worship, the black church gathers as an event. Yet the event occurs within the reliable, stable framework of

³⁷ J. Deotis Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1987), 53.

³⁸ Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, 53.

³⁹ Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, 54.

⁴⁰ Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, 54.

⁴¹ Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, 62.

⁴² Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, 62.

the institutionalized organization called “church”.⁴³ The Spirit is the one who heals, comforts, renews, and empowers in the context of meaningful worship. It is something that occurs not only inside of persons, but between persons. For Roberts, the Holy Spirit is the presence of power that is more interested in relationships between human beings than within them. Such emphasis on relationships may be scripturally cited in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 and the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5.⁴⁴ Roberts asserts that the Spirit not only heals, but it empowers us for liberation. One experiences the power of the Holy Spirit not only as a dove, but as wind and fire that helps us to envision the Comforter as the Strengthener. Thus, justice within the social order, just as much as love, peace, and joy within individual hearts, is the necessary “evidence” that the Spirit has been present in power.⁴⁵

The Pentecostalism Movement received great attention from John Nicols whose study of Pentecostalism assumed that the success and rise of American Pentecostalism was the result of its ability to appeal to the lower classes.⁴⁶ Nicol argues that Pentecostalism was not as radical, sectarian, or cultic as some critics believed, but was well situated within Christian orthodoxy. Pentecostalism accepts the Reformation doctrine that salvation is a free gift of grace, the view that all Christians constitute a priesthood of believers by virtue of their faith, and the normativity of Scripture for faith and practice, which can be interpreted by each and every Christian.⁴⁷

⁴³ Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, 63.

⁴⁴ Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, 63-64.

⁴⁵ Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, 64.

⁴⁶ John Thomas Nicol, *Pentecostalism* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1966).

⁴⁷ Nicol, *Pentecostalism*, 57.

Robert Mapes Anderson's 1979 study of American Pentecostalism is perhaps the culmination of research into Pentecostalism from the perspective of deprivation.

Anderson states that we can learn from the study of then Pentecostal movement something about the way in which movements of the "disinherited" that arise out of protest against the social order are transformed into religious forces that serve to perpetuate that order.⁴⁸

One of the larger Holy Spirit movements in black American churches is Pentecostalism. Roberts questions whether Pentecostalism provides the same experience of the outpouring of the Spirit that occurred in the New Testament. Roberts notes that despite Pentecostalism's emphasis on "moral perfection," its virtues are often "negative and private."⁴⁹ Further, Pentecostalism ignores social transformation because it is short on social conscience and commitment to social justice. Therefore, Roberts profusely disagrees with the foundational principles and practices of Pentecostalism.

Current political and cultural viewpoints over "family values" have threatened the survival of black families. J. Deotis Roberts puts it this way: "Again, we must no longer look for the ideal family – a husband, wife and children – as the only model of black family life. Although we must find ways to lift up and celebrate that ideal, we must not look down upon other models of family life. In our ministry to black people we must welcome and seek to enrich all families. All families should find encouragement, empowerment, and enrichment in the black church."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 8.

⁴⁹ Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, 58.

⁵⁰ Andrews and Smith Jr., *Black Practical Theology*, 40.

In 2017, most major news outlets often describe black families as dysfunctional social units. It is in large part, the black church's responsibility to resist the demonization of the black family. The black church's definition of the black family should be the only definition that truly matters. Where love is poured out abundantly, wisdom is shared liberally, support is given unconditionally, truth is shared compassionately, and joy is pursued with abandon, there is the black family.⁵¹ This is the family that ought to nurture and prepare our youth for life. Black pastors, ministers, scholars, critical thinkers, and theologians are uniquely positioned to support the reconciliation and total well-being of black families and should do their very best to do within the framework of Black Liberation Theology, the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the Pentecostalism Movement constructs.

Despite the unique position many of our church leaders are in to transform the lives of our black families which include our young black males; millions of youths are suffering from social despair with economic and emotional anxiety and a rage toward society. They believe that in order to obtain their share of the American dream, it is necessary to employ any means. For many youths this means participating in an illegal and underground economy. The pursuit of an education is often alienated by this social despair to the point that it does not seem to be a logical or feasible course for them to take.⁵²

Ultimately, a moral value of education must be emphasized within the families, young black males and local churches. The principles of Black Liberation Theology, the

⁵¹ Andrews and Smith Jr., *Black Practical Theology*, 40.

⁵² David D. Mitchell, *Black Theology and Youths at Risk* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2001), 16.

Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and the Pentecostalism Movement can be applied together so that the following moral values can be properly developed and strengthened: (1) the importance of a quality education, (2) a strong work ethic, (3) the need to compete, (4) the African-American story, (5) family, community, and vocational responsibility, (6) reputation, respect, integrity, loyalty, commitment, and honesty, and (7) financial responsibility.⁵³

Education as a necessary principle was programmed into African-Americans' psyches. Education was regarded as a value that was necessary for one to become a respected and productive citizen. A negative attitude toward education was not socially acceptable; an individual with such a viewpoint would be viewed with disapproval, and parents, teachers, ministers, and mentors would instruct other youths not to befriend that person. This value was believed by the African-American community to be essential for individual and common progress of moral human development. Education was regarded by the African-American community as an essential value necessary to establish personal worth and common progress;⁵⁴ but something happened within my ministry contexts in both Passaic, New Jersey and Rahway, New Jersey.

These factors have led and lead millions of youths to develop the "Destructive Capitalistic Personality Complex" or DCPC. It is rooted in anger, individualism, and immorality. This Destructive Capitalistic Personality Complex is the African-American community's public enemy number one. Black Liberation Theology can initiate a new

⁵³ Mitchell, *Black Theology and Youths at Risk*, 87.

⁵⁴ Mitchell, *Black Theology and Youths at Risk*, 89-90.

liberation movement in the African-American community if it pursues a strategic plan of action focusing on the DCPC and the environment from which it emerged.⁵⁵

In closing, the time has come for Black Liberation Theology, the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and the Pentecostalism Movement to rise to the occasion and become practical means to educate, empower and encourage young black males who are at risk. All three of these constructs must mature from being just a prophetic voice that critiques the effects of racism; but also figure out practical methods which will instill moral values and also liberate young black males from improper behaviors which are destroying their lives and perpetuating self-imposed despair. The Black Church's attention and focus must be turned directly upon and spirituality rooted in Black Liberation Theology so that a strong moral foundation for young black males is established. When young black males destroy their own spiritual compass, their expectation of hope is also destroyed. The elimination of racism is not the only solution. Besides establishing a strong moral foundation for young black males it is also necessary to improve black families, and their love for themselves, love for young black males, and love a quality education so that the educational achievement gap can be closed.

⁵⁵ Mitchell, *Black Theology and Youths at Risk*, 17.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This theoretical foundation chapter will identify two dissertations. The first dissertation is entitled “Saving Our Sons: The Impact of a Single Gender Public School on the Social, Emotional and Academic Progress of Young African Males from Low Socioeconomic Urban Neighborhoods.” The second dissertation is entitled “Education in Peril: A Comparative Study of Black Male High School Dropouts and Graduates.” Furthermore, the chapter will examine the disciplines of education as well as language and sociocultural theory in peer reviewed journal articles. One specific aim of this identification is to critically examine how single gender public schools affect the social, emotional, and academic progress of young, low-income African American males and simultaneously close the educational achievement gap. To be clear, effective schools remain essential for educational achievement. Yet, my assumption is that a single gender public school will not successfully close the educational achievement gap solely on its own merit and merit.

Six or seven hour of instruction a day for 180 days a year cannot overcome the effects of a deprived and impoverished home environment for eighteen hours a day, 365 days a year. If society wants to see young black males succeed in educational achievement, we must invest in programs that are well outside the conventional ways of thinking about schools. We must address health, mobility, housing, nutrition,

unemployment, family structure, medical and dental care, and a host of other factors.¹ In addition, I will also critique the assumption that “many African American males come to school without adequate social skills to function in a classroom environment. These males are confronted with two ‘selves’: ‘one-self,’ which depicts what community and peers expect of them, and the ‘other-self,’ what the school expects of them.”² Anyone who dismissed or downplays the trouble with young black males is ignoring a changing world. While young black females seem to be stampeding into college and young black males are lagging behind within my congregational context, the job market is becoming decidedly less hospitable to people who lack a college degree. During most of the twentieth century, the economy relied on a solid agricultural and manufacturing base, which depended on large numbers of unskilled or semiskilled workers. But in the last thirty years in both Passaic, New Jersey and Rahway, New Jersey the manufacturing sector has shrunk, replaced by service-based industries that favor workers with more than a high school diploma.

In other words, young black males who come to school without adequate social skills to function in a classroom environment will likely disengage from learning in school, will fail to reach their full potential, will suffer an assault to their self-esteem and confidence, and will ultimately set themselves up for a life of economic insecurity.

¹ Richard Rothstein, *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2004).

² E. E. Bell, “Educating African American Males,” accessed November 30, 2017, http://works.bepress.com/edward_bell.

The second dissertation is entitled *Education In Peril: A Comparative Study Of Black Male High School Dropouts And Graduates*.³ The specific aim of this dissertation is to critically examine youth development which is subset within the broad field of human development. Youth development refers to the stages that all children go through to acquire the attitudes, competencies, values and social skills they need to become successful adults.⁴ Youth development focuses on those specific activities that nurture development and academic achievement rather than focusing on reducing particular risk or preventing specific problems. The ultimate goal of youth development is to help prepare youth to complete high school, be productive, live ethically and responsibly, contribute to their community, i.e. citizenship, and live healthy lives.⁵ As a result the educational achievement gap would close.

Psychologist Erik Erikson, an early pioneer in developmental theory, established a model of human development based on a series of normative stages that constitute growth and maturity of the individual.⁶ I believe that if young black males systematically and successfully go through Erikson's model of human development; then they will develop into a well-adjusted, successful adult. As a result, the educational achievement gap would be closed.

Furthermore, I will examine the disciplines of education as well as language and sociocultural theory in peer reviewed journal articles. The first peer reviewed journal

³ Emby McKinley Miller, "Education in Peril: A Comparative Study of Black Male High School Dropouts and Graduate" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2014).

⁴ R. W. Larson, "How U.S. Children Spend Time: What it Does (and Doesn't) Tell Us about Their Development," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, American Psychology Society, 2001.

⁵ Miller, "Education in Peril," 25.

⁶ Miller, "Education in Peril," 24, 25.

article is entitled, *From Deficiency to Strength: Shifting the Mindset about Education Inequality*.⁷ From Zhao's journal article I will point out the complex reasons for the lack of progress in closing the educational achievement gap and I will share evidence which suggests an alternative paradigm shift in education.

The second peer reviewed journal article is entitled, *Jesus and the streets: A hermeneutical framework for understanding the intra-racial gender academic achievement gap in black urban America and the United Kingdom*.⁸ In this journal article I will discuss two dominant language and sociocultural theories. One is Ogbu's burden of acting white or oppositional culture hypothesis and Steele's stereotype threat theory. Both positions, essentially argue that the choice between exercising a black cultural ethos and striving for academic success with the larger society diametrically oppose one another.⁹

Without question, education is the key to progress and prosperity in the United States today. Whether fair or not, educational opportunities and academic achievement are directly tied to the social divisions associated with race, ethnicity, gender, first language, and social class. The level and quality of educational attainment either opens the doors to opportunity or closes them. Education starts at home, in neighborhoods, and in communities. Reading to children, creating time and space for homework, and demonstrating –through words and deeds – that education is important are the key first

⁷ Yong Zhao, "From Deficiency to Strength: Shifting the Mindset about Education Inequality," *Journal of Social Issues* 72, no. 4 (2016): 720-739.

⁸ Paul Camy Mocombe, Carol Tomlin, and Victoria Showummi, "Jesus and the Streets: A Hermeneutical Framework for Understanding the Intra-racial Gender Academic Achievement Gap in Black Urban America and the United Kingdom," *West Virginia State University/The Mocombein Foundation, LST* 1.2 (2014): 125-152.

⁹ Mocombe, Tomlin, and Showummi, "Jesus and the Streets," 128.

building blocks for high educational achievement. While schools are responsible for what children are taught, reinforcement at home is essential. As members of the beloved community, we must take responsibility for educating all our children – whether ours by birth or otherwise – to uplift our people as a whole.¹⁰

Relevant work done by school-family-community partnerships are collaborative initiatives in which all of these entities work together to help children succeed. These stakeholders are mutual and equal partners who collaborate to plan, coordinate, and implement programs and activities in homes, schools, and the community to foster strength and resilience in children.¹¹ According to Bryan and Henry, a multi-systemic approach that brings school, family, and community stakeholders together to serve students is essential for students. Despite the risks and adversities associated with income inequality, students from low-income backgrounds can succeed with the right support.¹²

One relevant work that specifically deals with the issues addressed in my project can be found in a journal article entitled, *The Effects of a Counselor-Led, faith-Based, School-Family-Community Partnership on Student Achievement in a High-Poverty Urban Elementary School*¹³ A faith-based partnership is one type of school-family-community partnership. It includes a faith-based organization, that is, “any

¹⁰ Tavis Smiley, *The Covenant with Black America: 10 Years Later* (New York, NY: Smiley Books, 2016), 28.

¹¹ J. Bryan and L. Henry, “A Model for Building School-Family-Community Partnerships: Principles and Process, *Journal of Counseling and Development* 90 (2012): 408-420.

¹² J. M. Williams and T. A. A. Portman, “No One Ever Asked Me: Urban African American Students’ Perceptions of Educational Resilience,” *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 42 (2014): 13-30.

¹³ Lynette M. Henry, Julia Bryan, and Carlos P. Zalaquett, “The Effects of a Counselor-Led, Faith-Based, School-Family-Community Partnership on Student Achievement in a High-Poverty Urban Elementary School,” *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 45 (July 2017).

group/organization created by or a religious or spiritual group including, but not limited to, individual places of worship groups of community or tribal elders/spiritual leaders, intra-or interdenominational community coalitions, faith connected health and human service agencies.¹⁴

Faith-based school-family-community (FBSFC) partnerships are partnerships in which a faith-based organization and its members play a focal role in working with school, family, and even other community members to develop and implement activities and programs to enhance students' academic, socioemotional, and college career outcomes. These FBSFC partnerships frequently exist in high-poverty schools and communities.¹⁵ Indeed, faith-based organizations are critical sources of social capital for low-income families and community residents. They act as a key influencer on social justice issues, often stimulating economic, political, and social change.¹⁶ It is important to note that these organizations cannot “engage in inherently religious activities, such as religious worship, instruction, or proselytization”. Rather, the promotion of FBSFC partnerships is fueled by the perceived potential of these links to foster positive outcomes for children, families, and communities.¹⁷

Given the limited information about outcomes from FBSFC partnerships specifically, *The Effects of a Counselor-Led, Faith-Based, School-Family-Community*

¹⁴ S. Bronheim, “Sharing a Legacy of Caring: Partnerships between Health Care and Faith-Based Organizations,” National Center for Cultural Competence, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/faith.pdf>.

¹⁵ Henry, Bryan, and Zalaquett, “The Effects of a Counselor-Led,” 165.

¹⁶ P. M. Miller and M. T. Engel, “Forging Vertical Linkages in the Public Sphere: School-Church Engagement on Social Justice,” *Educational Foundations* 25 (2011): 25-42.

¹⁷ Miller and Engel, “Forging Vertical Linkages,” 35.

Partnership on Student Achievement in a High-Poverty Urban Elementary School journal article reports on a study which examined the effects of an FBSFC partnership on reading achievement in a high-poverty urban elementary school, Charisma ES, over the three school years 2010-2013. To achieve this purpose, a matching control school, Joseph ES (a pseudonym), for comparison. The controlled school was similar to Charisma ES but did not have an FBSFC partnership. Also examined were the academic achievement differences between adopted and non-adopted classrooms and mentored and non-mentored students with Charisma ES¹⁸. Overall, findings reveal that FBSFC partnerships that incorporated individual student mentoring, classroom-level support through classroom adoption of volunteers, and school-wide rewards and incentives for students and families can have positive effects on reading achievement for students.¹⁹ One of the question marks that I took away from the FBSFC partnership was that the researchers could not say that the FBSFC partnership was solely responsible for the improvement in the Charisma ES reading scores. Although, it seemed that the supports and resources provided through this partnership helped students from economically challenged families make reading achievement gains at a faster pace compared with similar students in a matching school without such a partnership.²⁰

Nonetheless, a resource that helped me bring my theme and hypothesis into much sharper focus was the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion whose aim is to “*combine the highest standards of scholarship with a serious commitment to faith, resulting in*

¹⁸ Henry, Bryan, and Zalaquett, “The Effects of a Counselor-Led,” 168-169.

¹⁹ Henry, Bryan, and Zalaquett, “The Effects of a Counselor-Led,” 173.

²⁰ Henry, Bryan, and Zalaquett, “The Effects of a Counselor-Led,” 174.

*studies that not only plumb basic questions, but produce results that are relevant to religious organizations, address moral controversies, and contribute to social health.*²¹

In the summer of 2001, the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society undertook a research study to learn more about community organizations serving at-risk and high-risk children. Loconte and Fantuzzo took the Ivy League colleges' research to the next level by not only conducting in-depth interviews with only the beneficiaries of faith-based services, but with those who actually provide these services. *Churches, Charity, and Children: How Religious Organizations are Rescuing America's At-Risk Kids*, raises many important questions related to the sometime contentious debate surrounding public support for social services delivered by faith-based organizations –and then answers these questions based on insightful interview data.²²

Loconte and Fantuzzo's research confirms what anyone who spends any significant amount of time observing faith-based organizations already knows, namely: (1) religious organizations serve civic purposes; (2) religious approaches meet needs in the lives of youth by building relationships of trust and love; (3) many faith-based organizations consider faith to be central to their effectiveness; and (4) religious organizations are careful to respect the beliefs of youth and their families.²³

Churches and religious groups offer a vast array of services to their local communities, programs that sometimes are not being provided elsewhere. Loconte &

²¹ J. Loconte and L. Fantuzzo, "Churches, Charity and Children: How Religious Organizations Are Reading America's At-Risk Kids," Baylor University, 2012, accessed November 30, 2017, <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/24229.pdf>.

²² Loconte and Fantuzzo, "Churches, Charity and Children," 3.

²³ Loconte and Fantuzzo, "Churches, Charity and Children," 3.

Fantuzzo consider two organizations, both of which claim a guiding Christian vision.

The Brese Foundation which works in one of the poorest and most crime-ridden communities in Los Angeles County. The Brese Foundation offers job training, literacy programs, computer classes –but all are publicly funded and aimed at juvenile offenders and other at-risk youth. By contrast, the Seattle Urban Academy takes no government money, yet only accepts students who’ve been tossed out of government schools – because of drug use, weapons possession, truancy, or other problems. Both groups are religious, yet both clearly serve public aims.²⁴

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, one of the most important studies of America’s youth, found that the active involvement of a caring adult is the best defense against delinquency, academic failure, substance abuse and other problems.

“Time and time again, the home environment emerges as central in shaping outcomes for American youth,” researchers concluded. “Children who report feeling connected to a parent are protected against many different kinds of risks.”²⁵ Asian Youth Ministries in Red Bank, NJ helps kids whose parents are unavailable or unable to offer much support. Asian Youth Ministries tutors about 275 public school children, most living in housing projects where single-parent homes are the norm. “Kids don’t come to tutoring because they love reading and math,” says executive director Craig Bogard. “They come because they want to be loved.”

²⁴ Loconte and Fantuzzo, “Churches, Charity and Children,” 8.

²⁵ Robert W. Blum and Peggy Mann Rinehart, “Reducing the Risk Connections that Make a Difference in the Lives of Youth,” Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota. Based on data first published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, September 10, 1997.

The Harambee Christian Family Center runs an after-school tutoring program in high-crime neighborhoods in Pasadena, California. Staff and volunteers deliver a heavy dose of Bible instruction and tough-love mentoring. “We are living it out every day, changing lives, building disciples and modeling Christ,” says associate director Rudy Carrasco. “You need something as strong as a gang to reach these kids.”²⁶

The Central Detroit Christian Development Corporation provides affordable housing, tutoring and other services to youth and their families living in the poorest zip code in the state of Michigan. In a public school targeted by the ministry, barely one in four students entering ninth grade every year will graduate. In other words, failure is the defining feature of life for many of these kids—a problem that youth workers say will not be cured by typical self-esteem strategies. Hence, the organization’s creed: “Real change in a community starts with a heart change through a relationship with Jesus Christ.”²⁷

In many cases, religious belief appears crucial for troubled kids. Youth workers commonly see enraged or depressed adolescents “acting out” because their fathers have abandoned them. How to break the grip of resentment? Faith in God, they say, which leads to forgiveness. “Ninety-nine percent of the men are angry because they don’t have a father in the home”, says the Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson, founder of Brotherhood Organization of a New Destiny in Los Angeles. “This is the only way we can ever hope to guide young people.” Many young people might say the same thing. According to research from the Institute for Youth Development, about 94 percent of teenagers say they believe in God. Nearly nine in ten teens consider their religious beliefs important to

²⁶ Loconte and Fantuzzo, “Churches, Charity and Children,” 9.

²⁷ Loconte and Fantuzzo, “Churches, Charity and Children,” 10.

them. With numbers like this, the argument that religious themes should never be raised with kids is a little baffling.”²⁸

Another relevant work which deals with the issues addressed within my project can be found in a journal article entitled, *The Educational Achievement Gap as a Social Justice Issue for Teacher Educators*.²⁹ The teacher educators in a Catholic, Marianist university, drew on Catholic and Marianist traditions of social justice to frame their response to the educational achievement gap –i.e., the educational attainment of low-income students and students of color compared to their more affluent, White peers.

The Catholic conception of social justice rooted in the idea of universal human dignity and human rights. It calls every person to work with others for the common good from her or his own position and role in society. Marianist writers describe the fruits of social justice at both the individual and societal level. Social justice empowers individuals “to improve their own capacity to maintain their dignity and to claim their rightful place in the social order.”³⁰

The Dayton Early College Academy (DECA), founded on the University of Dayton’s campus to prepare seventh through twelfth graders to become first-generation college graduates, has become an essential site for preparing University of Dayton teacher candidates to become effective teachers of traditionally underachieving students. This collaboration has resulted in the ongoing transformation of a school and a

²⁸ Institute for Youth Development, *America’s Youth: Measuring the Risk* (Washington, DC: The Institute for Youth Development, 2002), 20.

²⁹ Rachel Collopy and Connie Bowman, “The Educational Achievement Gap as a Social Justice Issue for Teacher Educators,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 16, no. 1 (September 2012): 4-25.

³⁰ R. J. Bordano, M. A. Cavanaugh, and L. J. Cade, “Social Justice in the Marianist Tradition,” *Marianist Soundings* 1 (1996): 4-16.

university's teacher education program to address the social injustice of the educational achievement gap.³¹

The early Marianists' work in education echoes three foundational ideas in Catholic teaching on social justice. First, the Marianists joined with others in their sphere of life on problems that were too onerous for individuals acting alone, namely social class disparity in access to quality education. Second, Marianists strove to transform social institutions to better serve the common good through reformulations of the structures of schooling and teacher education. Third, the Marianists' actions furthered human rights. Marianists' strengthening of normal school curricula for teachers and creation of schools for the middle and lower classes afforded a quality education to people denied that basic, inalienable human right.³²

In the contemporary United States, universal schooling is available for all students regardless of socioeconomic class, race, or ethnicity. However, substantial disparities in educational achievement by both socioeconomic class and race exist. These disparities deny the common good by significantly undermining the ability of individuals to participate in American society, to fulfill their potential, or to work and thereby have their material needs met. The employment rate, for example, rises with educational attainment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). In short, the educational achievement gap violates the common good because it systemically impedes classes of people from reaching their potential and flourishing as part of the greater society.³³

³¹ Collopy and Bowman, "The Educational Achievement Gap," 4.

³² Collopy and Bowman, "The Educational Achievement Gap," 5.

³³ Collopy and Bowman, "The Educational Achievement Gap," 7.

The Collopy journal article also describes three intertwined initiatives undertaken at the University of Dayton to increase educational achievement and access for youth from traditionally underachieving groups. First, the Dayton Early College Academy (DECA) is a seventh through twelfth grade school housed on the University of Dayton's campus. DECA was created to prepare potential first-generation college students and currently serves approximately 425 students. DECA is the nation's only public, charter school operated by a Catholic university. DECA provides an example of social justice both as the empowerment of traditionally marginalized individuals via education and as the transformation of a social institution, the school.³⁴

The second initiative describes involved substantial changes to a required sophomore year development course. Through coordinated readings, assignments, and twenty hours of field experience at DECA, teacher candidates examine their preconceptions about students from a variety of racial, ethnic, and class background and their own role and responsibility as educators in fostering resiliency and academic success. As a third initiative, the Collopy journal article describes the practice of clinic rounds during senior year methods courses. DECA teachers, university methods instructors, and teacher candidates participate in this communal practice of making pedagogical thinking explicit.³⁵

The financial reform discipline found in the journal article, entitled *The "Race To The Top" And The Inevitable Fall To The Bottom: How The Principles Of The "Campaign For Fiscal Equity" And Economic Integration Can Help Close The*

³⁴ Collopy and Bowman, "The Educational Achievement Gap," 9.

³⁵ Collopy and Bowman, "The Educational Achievement Gap," 10.

Achievement Gap informs my project thesis.³⁶ Millions of American children from low-income and minority communities face educational inequities that result in underperformance and, ultimately, an American citizenry largely uneducated and ill-prepared to be contributing members of society. In many respects, this inequity in education is the civil rights issue of our time.³⁷

Education reform must be comprehensive; even semantics must be considered. The term “achievement gap” has a derogatory connotation in the sense that it implies that the “gap” is largely a student-centered problem. In reality, students do not need to catch up, the system does. For this reason, education reform should begin with a very simple change—in terminology. Instead of identifying the problem as an “achievement gap” the phrase “funding gap” or “education debt gap” would serve as a more appropriate label.³⁸

Focusing solely on salaries and revenues distracts from other equally important problems, such as quality of education. Other factors affecting the quality of students’ education must also be considered in regard to both causes of and solutions to the achievement gap.³⁹ In New York, a new era in school finance reform began with the enactment of the New York State Education Budget and Reform Act (“EBRA”) of 2007-

³⁶ Cassandra Abbott, “The ‘Race to the Top’ and the Inevitable Fall to the Bottom: How the Principles of the ‘Campaign for Fiscal Equity’ and Economic Integration Can Help Close the Achievement Gap,” *B.Y.U. Educational and Law Journal* 94 (June 2013).

³⁷ Alliance for Quality Education and Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc., “Testimony to the Joint Senate Finance Committees and Assembly Ways and Means,” 4, February 15, 2011, http://www.aqeny.org/ny/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/2_15_2011-Joint-CFE-AQE-legislative-budget-hearing-education-final.pdf.

³⁸ Gloria Ladson-Billings, “Gloria Ladson-Billings Reframes the Racial Achievement Gap,” National Writing Project, April 2007, <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2513>.

³⁹ Stephanie Aberger, “Closing the Achievement Gap: The Overlooked Strategy of Socioeconomic Integration,” 12, November 20, 2009, <http://a100educationalpolicy.pbworks.com/f/Closing+the+Achievement+Gap+Socioeconomic+Integration.pdf>.

2008.⁴⁰ EBRA accountability measures were meant to ensure that “new resources reach the highest-need students in the lowest-performing schools,” and affirmative actions that would help lessen the achievement gap. When executed correctly, the accountability measures also provide the transparency necessary to determine if the stated goals are being achieved, which is another important safeguard to help ensure that funding is being spend appropriately.⁴¹

The Campaign for Fiscal Equity’s “key accountability tool” is the Contract for Excellence Contract. The Contract provides each low-performing school district with a substantial funding increase. In exchange, the school is required to submit a Contract indicating how the additional funding will be spent and what it will accomplish. Accountability is key to education reform. By following the accountability initiatives of CFE, a successful reform can be implemented on the federal level, as well. Holding states responsible for their performance under accountability regulations will help counteract the achievement gap.⁴²

Gloria Ladson-Billings, a Professor of Urban Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, analogizes the achievement gap issue in education to the debate concerning the United States’ national debt program. She points out that while political figures boast about budgets that do not contribute to the current national debt, discussions

⁴⁰ Campaign for Fiscal Equity, “Testimony of Helanie K. Doran, Deputy Director of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE): 2008-2009 Budget Testimony,” February 4, 2008, [http://www.cfequity.org/static_pages/2008%20budget%20testimony%202-4-08 final.pdf](http://www.cfequity.org/static_pages/2008%20budget%20testimony%202-4-08%20final.pdf).

⁴¹ Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Implementation and Accountability, “Our Work,” last modified December 27, 2012, accessed November 30, 2017, http://www.cfequity.org/static.php?page=implemntation_and_accountabiity&category=our_work.

⁴² Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Implementation and Accountability, “Our Work.”

concerning ways to rectify the debt are often overlooked.⁴³ A similar problem exists in the education funding context. Even when equal funding is judicially mandated in order to stop the widening of the achievement gap, poorer schools continue to lag behind wealthier schools because the achievement gap is not being closed; it merely remains static.⁴⁴

Another discipline that informs my project thesis centers around Critical Race Theory (CRT) which is a theoretical framework in the social sciences. Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers one race-conscious approach to understanding educational inequality and identifying potential solutions. CRT takes us beyond the traditional approaches and understandings of educational inequality. It foregrounds race as the central construct for analyzing inequality, and it offers educators and students alike with an alternative perspective in identifying more effective solutions to the challenge students of color face in school.⁴⁵

The movement towards CRT in education arose from Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate's 1995 call for greater theorizing around issues of race and education during their groundbreaking presentation at the American Education Research Association conference. Frustrated with an under-theorized utilization of race in educational scholarship, Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) specifically called for a new movement in education rooted in CRT. Ladson-Billings and Tate were discouraged with

⁴³ Ladson-Billings, "Gloria Ladson-Billings."

⁴⁴ Ladson-Billings, "Gloria Ladson-Billings."

⁴⁵ Margaret H. Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters: Education and Ideology* (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, 2011), 2.

the educational literature that presented race as either merely an ideological construct or an objective condition.⁴⁶

CRT also embraces the goal of equality, freedom, and merit. However, CRT challenges the viability of achieving genuine equality, freedom, and merit in the absence of a critique of liberalism. The major critique of liberalism is that it constructs an image of society as fair and egalitarian where individuals rise and fall based on their own merits.⁴⁷ A CRT approach to education would be an important alternative to approaches that foster stereotypes, advance superficial understandings of culture, marginalize the experiences of people of color in the curriculum, and present the study of people of color as passive –as opposed to active – exercise.⁴⁸ CRT is helpful in reminding educators who wish to promote an authentic multicultural education that they need to help students develop skills which will allow them to work side-by-side with community activists to advance social justice.⁴⁹ It reminds those who pursue multicultural education that whites must also be held accountable for the racism endemic in society, and that they can and must play an active role in the struggle against the “isms” and other forms of subordination in our time.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 7.

⁴⁷ Zamudio et al., *Critical Race Theory Matters*, 16.

⁴⁸ Tara J. Yosso, “Toward a Critical Race Curriculum,” *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35, no. 2 (2002): 93.

⁴⁹ Yosso, “Toward a Critical Race Curriculum,” 93.

⁵⁰ Christine Sleeter and Bernal Dolores Delgado, “Critical Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, and Antiracist Education: Implications for Multicultural Education,” in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, edited by J.A. Banks and C.A. McGee Banks, 240-258 (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

This theoretical study is foundational to my anticipated D. Min. project by solidifying the fact that closing the educational achievement gap of young black males is more complex than I originally thought. Some of the theoretical perspectives held by researchers in the various disciplines require a clear understanding of the cause of an issue before a solution can be found, while other theoretical perspectives don't seem to be concerned with causes and rather focus their energies on solutions that solve the problem.

One of the potential problems with trying to determine the cause of the educational achievement gap in young black males is that, even when discovered, can something be done to change the situation? For example, in a journal article entitled, *Home Connectivity and the Homework Gap*⁵¹, nearly one on five, 17.5 percent, of home with school-aged children does not have access to broadband, according to the Pew Research Center. Those numbers get starker when looking at kids from less economically privileged homes – 31.4 percent of households making under \$50,000 a year and 39.7 percent of homes taking in less than \$25,000 –or students of different racial backgrounds, with black and Hispanic families with school-aged children having no access to broadband at rates of about 39 and 37 percent, respectively. With such disparity in home broadband access, is the internet destined to become just another wedge pushing the educational achievement gap wider?⁵²

Another example of the difficulty of this issue is that many theoretical perspectives focus on what happens inside the schools, but it is clear to me that the educational achievement gap of young black males both begins and widens outside of

⁵¹ Joshua Bolkan, "Home Connectivity and the Homework Gap," *Equity and Technology* (October 2017): 19.

⁵² Bolkan, "Home Connectivity," 19.

schools. In fact, I would argue that the educational achievement gap forms before school starts and even widens during summer months when young black males are out of school. Future research and revelation on my part will advance my knowledge on this difficult issue.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The purpose of this research study was to apply my distinct ministerial skills; interests and serve my ministerial context at Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Rahway, New Jersey in such a way that young African American males living in single parent households who are struggling academically will be able to close their educational achievement gap.

I examined the perceptions and realities of the academic experiences and the ongoing journey of fourteen young African American males ages eleven to seventeen. These fourteen young African American males are members of Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Rahway, New Jersey and are inaugural members of the Sons of Issachar Young Men's Ministry.

Young African American Male Participant Profiles

All fourteen young African American males between ages eleven to seventeen fully participated in this research study. Ten student participants live in Rahway, New Jersey. Two student participants live in Linden, New Jersey. One student participant lives in Metuchen, New Jersey and one student participant lives in North Burlington, New Jersey.

Three student participants attend public high school. Two student participants attend catholic high school. Seven student participants attend elementary school. Two student participants attend the 7th an 8th public school grade academy.

Demographic Profiles of the Young African American Males

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade/School Location</u>	<u>Approximate G.P.A.</u>
1	Male	13	8/Linden, New Jersey	2.0
2	Male	13	9/Rahway, New Jersey	2.5
3	Male	16	11/Mansfield Township, NJ	2.0
4	Male	14	10/Linden, New Jersey	1.6
5	Male	16	11/Metuchen, New Jersey	2.5
6	Male	11	7/Rahway, New Jersey	2.0
7	Male	12	8/Rahway, New Jersey	1.6
8	Male	11	7/Rahway, New Jersey	3.0
9	Male	13	9/Rahway, New Jersey	2.0
10	Male	17	12/Rahway, New Jersey	2.0
11	Male	17	12/Rahway, New Jersey	2.0
12	Male	12	8/Rahway, New Jersey	2.5
13	Male	15	10/Rahway, New Jersey	2.0
14	Male	13	9/Rahway, New Jersey	2.0

Participant One

Participant one is a thirteen-year old young black male who currently attends Soehl Middle School in Linden, New Jersey. Participant one is in the eighth grade and his favorite class is history; while his least favorite class is math. He spends approximately two to three hours per week doing homework. He lives with his mom and two sisters. His mom works two jobs and is too tired to devote lots of attention to himself or his homework. Participant one would like to find a quiet place to study and do his homework but the public library is undergoing renovations and the Soehl Middle School library is too noisy because some of the students hang out inside the library talking loud

instead of studying. Participant one would like to come to Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Rahway, New Jersey after school to relax, eat, study and finish his homework assignments. Participant one would like to do better at math before he moves onto the high school next year. If participant one could be one person in the entire world, he would be Frank Sinatra because he is great at music.

Participant Two

Participant two is a thirteen-year old young black male who is enrolled in Rahway High School in Rahway, New Jersey. Participant two is a ninth-grade student who feels that education is pretty important to him. Participant two spends only one hour per week studying and completing his class assignments. His primary challenge is time management and prays hard that he could stop procrastinating while playing video games. Participant two lives with his grandmother along with his two brothers. When participant two grows up he feels that he would like to become a sports agent because that is where all the money is. The one person participant two would like to be in the entire world is Jerry McGuire.

Participant Three

Participant three is a sixteen-year old young black male who attends Northern Burlington Regional High School in Mansfield Township, New Jersey. Participant three does not like the fact that his high school does not have air conditioning which makes it impossible to learn in the spring and summer months. Participant three has attended summer school during his ninth and tenth grades for English. He wishes that he could do

better in English because he is embarrassed when he has to read aloud in front of his classmates. He briefly played varsity football when participant three was in the ninth grade but due to his sub-par grades his divorced parents decided that it would be in his best interest for him to stop playing varsity football until his grades improved.

Participant three only spends thirty minutes on homework per week and wishes that divorced parents would stop arguing so much and start paying more attention to him. If participant three could be one person in the entire world he would be Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. because Dr. King made a difference and changed America for the better.

Participant Four

Participant four is a fourteen- year old young black male who attends Linden High School, in Linden, New Jersey. He is tenth grader who likes high school because of the different clubs and sport teams to choose from. Participant four does not like Linden High School because he feels it is located in a dangerous part of the town. He wants to transfer to Rahway High School because where he is enrolled now; he has a hard time concentrating in class. Nonetheless his education is extremely important to him because he wants to go to a good college. Participant four wants to prove “all the haters” wrong because all athletes are not dumb. He lives with his mother who also has health challenges in the form of breast cancer. Participant four also has ADHD which prevent him from focusing as much as he need to do in order to get good grades. If participant four could be one person in the entire world he would be his grandfather because he is very intelligent and fun to be around.

Participant Five

Participant five is a sixteen-year old young black male who attends St. Joseph High School in Metuchen, New Jersey. He is in the eleventh grade and hates that he can't have facial hair and that he has to wear name tags. Participant five feels that his high school is too strict and needs to loosen up. His parents are divorced and he lives with his mother who works a lot at the hospital as a registered nurse. Participant five tries to spend two hours each evening on homework but falls asleep after only the first 30 minutes studying. He claims that he may have a sleep disorder because it is difficult for him to stay awake in school.

Participant five's worst class is history because it is so boring. The class is so boring that sometimes participant five takes out his cell phone and scrolls social media. If he could be one person in the entire world he would love to be an inspirational person.

Participant Six

Participant six is an eleven-year old young black male who attends the Rahway 7th and 8th grade academy. He is in the seventh grade and wishes that he had more teachers who would help him with his classwork and encourage him to do better in school. Participant six gets into fights at school a lot because he is unhappy at home. He lives with both his grandmother and his mother in a small apartment. Participant six rarely does his homework. Instead, participant six plays videogames and listens to rap music throughout the night. Participant six also wonders why most of his teachers are white women and not black men. He doesn't have a favorite class and he cannot wait until the summer arrives.

If he could be one person in the entire world it would be Meek Mill because “he is real” and “he got money”.

Participant Seven

Participant seven is a twelve- year old young black male who attends the 7th and 8th grade academy in Rahway, New Jersey. He is an eighth grader who struggles in school because he has a seizure disorder. Participant seven feels that because of his seizure disorders most of his teachers write him off as learning disabled. This only makes participant seven try that much harder to do well in school. He lives with his aunt because his mom is in a nursing home and his father is incarcerated. Participant seven spends about 30 minutes per week on homework because his aunt makes him do lots of chores around the house when he gets home. This makes participant seven too tired to do his homework.

All of his classes are difficult and it looks like he may have to go to summer school if he wants to go onto Rahway High School in September, 2019. If he could be one person in the entire world, he would be Denzel Washington because he seems like he can do anything.

Participant Eight

Participant eight is an eleven-year old young black male who attends Grover Cleveland Elementary School in Rahway, New Jersey. He is a seventh grader whose teacher uses racial slurs towards him and his classmates by saying that “all you black people are the same”, and “you’re all dumb”. This bothers participant eight so much that

he feels that he has started to believe what one of his teachers told him. Participant eight has shared this with his grandmother who he lives with. His grandmother just tells him to just pray and God will make a way somehow. Participant eight is bothered by that because he feels that he should do much more than pray. He does little to no homework; but despite little to no effort participant eight still has a B average. Participant eight's favorite class is science and his least favorite class is gym because he doesn't want to run because of his asthma. If he could be one person in the entire world, it would be LeBron James because he is the greatest basketball player of all time; even better than Michael Jordan.

Participant Nine

Participant nine is a thirteen-year old young black male who attends Rahway High School in Rahway, New Jersey. He is a ninth grader who loves to draw all day every day. Participant nine finds school so boring and always tells his mom that he wants to transfer to the Academy for Performing Arts High School in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. As a result, participant nine does not work hard in Rahway High School and settles for C's on his report card. His mom has told her son many times that she does not feel comfortable taking him out of Rahway High School and having him travel thirty to forty-five minutes each and every day to school. In addition; participant nine's mom believes that a general studies high school diploma will be her son's ticket to a four-year college' not a high school diploma from a performing arts high school. Participant nine and his mom are at odds and she refuses to help her son with his homework or even ask him how he is doing in school. Participant nine wants out from under his mom's roof and a transfer to the

Academy of Performing Arts High School in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. If participant nine could be one person in the entire world he would be Jean-Michael Basquiat.

Participant Ten

Participant ten is a seventeen-year old young black male to attends Rahway High School in Rahway, New Jersey. He is a senior in high school who is more excited about picking a date to his senior prom that he is in studying. Participant ten lives with his mom, her live in boyfriend and hi three sisters. He says that the house is too crowded and too loud because the television is always on. Rahway High School is just a place for him to pass some time. Participant ten plans to go the U.S. Army after graduating from high school; but he hasn't met with a recruiter, taken any tests or knows what he is getting himself into.

Participant ten spends one hour per week on homework and it seems like no one in his household could care less. He has shared with this researcher that he wishes he could spend more time at Ebenezer A.M.E. Church instead of home because church is peaceful and a place where he could get some homework done. If participant ten could be any one person in the entire world he would be four-star general in the U.S. Army Colin Powell.

Participant Eleven

Participant eleven is a seventeen-year old young black male who attends Rahway High School. He is a twelve grader who claims that he wants to attend a four-year college following his high school graduation; but has not registered to take the S.A.T. exam yet

while most of his counterparts already have done so. Participant eleven is also hearing impaired and hopes to improve his hearing with the help of a brand-new hearing aid which he should receive by the beginning of 2019. His favorite class is woodshop because he like to use his hands while building different things. His least favorite class is algebra because math is just too hard. Participant eleven resides with his mom and his grandfather. Participant eleven spends just one hour per week on homework. He does not know what he wants to do after high school. Participant eleven believes that it doesn't really matter how hard he works in high school because most of the teachers just want all of their high school students to just get by. If participant eleven attends a four-year college; he will be the first in his entire family to attend a four-year college. If he could be one person in the entire world, he would be Kevin Hart because he is so funny.

Participant Twelve

Participant twelve is a twelve-year old young black male who attends Grover Cleveland Elementary School in Rahway, New Jersey. He is an eighth grader who enjoys school. Participant twelve's favorite class is history and his worse class is math. He lives with his aunt who is rarely home because she has three jobs to make ends meet. Participant twelve spends only about thirty minutes per day on homework but gets distracted fairly easy.

Participant twelve's aunt doesn't ask him how's school or even asks to see his homework. As a result, participant twelve is not motivated to learn. Participant twelve wants to do better in school and would like for the church "to step up" and open up a tutoring program right after school and provide a nice dinner. Participant twelve has no

idea what he wants to be when he grows up; as a result he needs some help in finding his purpose in life. If he could be any one person in the entire world he would be President Obama because he achieved the impossible; becoming the President of United States of America.

Participant Thirteen

Participant thirteen is a fifteen-year old young black male who attends Rahway High School. He is a tenth grader and wishes that he did not have to go to school. Participant thirteen just wants to work and “get paid”. Participant thirteen lives with his mom who is recently divorced. Participant thirteen is mad that his parents couldn’t work things out and sometimes he blames himself for their divorce. He doesn’t have a favorite class or a least favorite class. Participant thirteen simply goes to high school to be around the girls. Participant thirteen spends less than an hour on homework each week and does just enough to get by. He likes coming to church with his mom and has asked me if he could play the drums from time to time because he’s good at playing the drums. If he could be one person in the entire world, participant thirteen would be Questlove the great drummer who plays on the Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.

Participant Fourteen

Participant fourteen is a thirteen-year old young black male who attends Rahway High School. He is a ninth grader who is bored with high school. He claims that his classes are not challenging enough even though he is a C student. Participant fourteen lives with his grandmother who can barely get around the house on her walker. When

participant fourteen comes home from school he must do all of the chores, and make sure that his grandmother is ok. This takes a lot of time away from his studies. Participant fourteen wishes things were different because he doesn't have time to finish all of his homework and study on a nightly basis. His favorite class is social studies. His least favorite class is math. Participant fourteen has sought this researcher out for advice from time to time as to what he should do about taking care of his grandmother because it is adversely affecting his grades. He has also asked the researcher; is there anything Ebenezer A.M.E. Church can do help him during this difficult time. If participant fourteen could be one person in the entire world, he would be Boxing Champion Floyd Mayweather because he never lost a fight and he has too much money.

Methodology

This section will address what approach I took in gathering the data for my research study and how the data has guided my analysis. The best strategy for taking into consideration these factors was to use a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.¹ Using this method, I can observe these individuals in their natural environment with their friends where they most feel comfortable.²

The goals of this research study are to introduce measures which will allow young black males to close their educational achievement gap despite the many challenges they

¹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 4.

² R. C. Bogdan and S. K. Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theories and Methods* (Boston, MA: Pearson Learning Solutions, 2007).

face in their single parent household. Also, this research study will explore and better understand present realities that many young black males are facing in their day to day living within their single parent households. This research study will attempt to increase the majority of the young black males' sense of self-worth, sense of security and thirst for knowledge. In addition, this research study will try to improve single parent household's engagement in their young black male's educational achievement as he cultivates exceptional study habits. Finally; this research study will seek to improve the attitudes, perceptions, and values of the single parent household when it comes to their young black male's educational achievement.

Furthermore; the data will be incorporated into Ebenezer A.M.E. Church's Sons of Issachar Young Men's Ministry and will become a part of the vision and mission of this relevant, cutting edge community wide organization. Pastor Marti Robinson created the young black male pre-test and post-test questionnaire as well as the parent and/or guardian pre-test and post-test questionnaire.

The stages of my research were (1) gaining trust and buy-in from Ebenezer A.M.E. Church's congregation and church leaders (2) minimizing risk and excessive concern for this research study (3) understanding the risks and benefits of this research study (4) creating pre-tests and post-tests (5) administering pre-tests and post-tests (6) gather results from pre-tests and post-tests and integrate all results into this document.

This research study was initiated, implemented and administrated in the fellowship hall of Ebenezer A.M.E. Church, in Rahway, New Jersey. This research study used a team of four contextual associates to oversee the answering of all pre-test and post-tests by the parents, guardians, and/or young black males. The team consisted of Dr.

C. Alex Gray, Sis. Edith Knight, Sis. Paula Braxton and Sis. Pamela Parker McGee.

These contextual associates walked around the fellowship hall, gently monitored each research study participant and provided assistance if necessary. Upon the completion of the pre-tests and the post-tests; the contextual associates retrieved each pre-test and post-test and provided each of them to the researcher. The researcher thanked the parents, guardians, young black males and contextual associates for their time and began to safeguard all pre-tests and post-tests prior to gathering the data.

The context associates helped this researcher in making sure the parents, guardians, and/or congregation were comfortable with this research study as this will last several months and require some time and hard work. The professional associates; Dr. Robert C. Walker and Rev. Tracey J. Hunter Hayes will assist me in analyzing the results and inquire as to whether or not this research process is testing my hypothesis in the proper way.

The context of this research study started at Ebenezer A.M.E. Church in Rahway, N.J. This context was selected because all of the young black male participants are members of this congregation; convenience and familiarity with the context played a large role in selecting this context. The research events, in total covered seven weeks, the pre-test was administered on Sunday, September 16, 2018 right after our Youth Church Worship Service in our fellowship hall in order to attract the maximum number of young black males and his parent and/or guardian. The post-test was administered on Saturday, November 17, 2018 at a local Perkins in order to attract the maximum number of young black males and his parent and/or guardian.

One concern was making sure that the parents and/or guardians who are not all members of Ebenezer A.M.E. Church, Rahway, New Jersey were ready, willing, and able to fully participate in this research study by answering all of the pre-test and post-test questions. I believe that the parents and/or guardians participation in this research study is of utmost importance if their single parent household fosters an engagement learning environment for these young black males.

Eighteen questions were given to the parents and/or guardians for their pre-test and post-test. They are as follows:

1. What is your relationship to the young black male in your household?
2. What is the last grade that you completed in school?
3. How important is education to you?
4. If not important, why not?
5. Do you try to encourage him to do well in school?
6. (If yes) How do you encourage him to do well in school?
7. (If no) Why don't you encourage him to do well in school?
8. How many times per year do you visit his school?
9. How do you feel when you visit his school?
10. What, if anything stands in his way in terms of getting a good education?
11. Do other children try to stop him from doing well in school?
12. Are there any adults at home or at school whom you think try to stop him from doing well in school?
13. Please tell me about your upbringing? What was it like in terms of your pursuit of education?
14. Please describe how you try to raise the young black male who lives in your single parent household?

15. How many times a week do you read a newspaper?
16. How many times a week do you read a book?
17. Upon whom do you rely when you have a problem with the young black male who lives in your single parent household?
18. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Implementation

The researcher met with his four contextual associates; Dr. C. Alex Gray, Sis. Edith Knight, Sis. Paula Braxton, and Sis. Pamela Parker McGee back on Saturday, September 15, 2018 to share the purpose of my research study; distribute sample pre-tests and post-test; inform them of upcoming key dates; answer any questions and receive their permission to move forward with my research study.

Dr. C. Alex Gray (Professional Associate, Ph.D. University of Michigan); Sis. Edith Knight (Steward Board Member, Retired Teacher, Member, Christian Education Department) Sis. Paula Braxton (Trustee Board Member, Usher Board Member, Retired High School Principal), and Sis. Pamela Parker McGee (Steward Board Member, Director, Christian Education Department, Fellow Classmate, New Brunswick Theological Seminary) were all excited and ready to assist this research study from the beginning to its ending because each of them believed that this research study is a worthy cause.

On Saturday, October 6, 2018 members of the Sons of Issachar's Young Men's Ministry met at a local Pizza Hut. During this time of fellowship; the young black males returned their pre-test survey questions; plus I went over the Sons of Issachar's Young

Men's Ministry Vision & Guidelines along with the Robinson Foundation for Academic Excellence.

On Saturday, October 20, 2018 the Sons of Issachar Young Men's Ministry had a "Kick It Session" in our Ebenezer A.M.E. Church fellowship hall which also included some of the young black males' parents and/or guardians. I shared a motivational message based on "N.O.W" – No Opportunity Wasted: Finding God's Purpose For Our Life".

On Friday evening, November 2, 2018 the Sons of Issachar's Young Men's Ministry hosted a Panel Discussion with Educators, Community Leaders & Colleagues of Pastor Robinson. A light meal and refreshments were served; many parents and/or guardians were in attendance.

Our next Sons of Issachar Young Men's Ministry event was held on Saturday, November 17, 2018 at Perkins Restaurant. We enjoyed a large breakfast and I handed out our post-test. As I wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving Holiday; I also scheduled a day and time where the young black males could turn in their post-tests.

Summary of Learning

I learned throughout this seven- week research study; which will continue well past the completion of this dissertation that the educational achievement gap is largely connected to the continuous decline of the nuclear family. The research is clear that having two parents is very important for equity in educational achievement.³ It is hard to

³ Paul E. Barton and Richard J. Coley, *Parsing the Achievement Gap II*, Policy Information Report (Princeton, NJ: Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service, April 2009), 9-10.

imagine clear progress in closing the educational achievement gap in young black males without turning these disturbing family trends around.

Below are some of the results of the pre and post questionnaire from the parent and/or guardian which support the need to turn these disturbing family trends around.

1. What is your relationship to the young black male in your household?

Data Highlights: sixty five percent of the relationships were mothers, twenty five percent of the relationships were grandmothers, ten percent of the relationships were aunts, and zero percent of the relationships were fathers.

2. What is the last grade that you completed in school?

Data Highlights: ninety percent of the persons answered senior year in high school, ten percent of the persons answered some college and/or trade school

3. How important is his education to you?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent of the persons answered “his education is very important to me”

4. If not important, why not?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent of the persons answered “N/A”

5. Do you try to encourage him to do well in school?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent of the persons answered “yes”

6. (If yes) How do you encourage him to do well in school?

Data Highlights: fifty percent of the persons answered with some detail; while fifty percent of the persons provided no detail on the space provided for their response

7. (If no) Why don't you encourage him to do well in school?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent of the persons answered “n/a”

8. How many times per year do you visit his school?

Data Highlights: fifty percent of the persons answered at least twice a year; while fifty percent answered less than twice a year

9. How do you feel when you visit school?

Data Highlights: seventy five percent of the persons answered “ok”, while twenty five percent of the persons provided no detail on the space provided for their response

10. What, if anything stands in the way in terms of getting a good education?

Data Highlights: seventy five percent of the persons answered “attitude and/or laziness”; while twenty five percent of the persons provided no detail on the space provided for their response

11. Do other children try to stop him from doing well in school?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent of the persons answered “I don’t know”

12. Are there any adults at home or at school whom you think try to stop him from doing well in school?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent of the persons answered “no”.

13. Please tell me about your upbringing? What was it like in terms of your pursuit of education?

Data Highlights: ninety percent of the persons answered that education was not encouraged throughout their upbringing; while ten percent shared that education was very important in their upbringing

14. Please describe how you try to raise the young black male who lived in your household?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent of the persons answered that they try to raise the young black male who lives in their household “to be respectful to others and/or make sure that he does his chores everyday”

15. How many times a week do you read a newspaper?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent answered “zero”

16. How many times a week do you read a book?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent answered “zero”

17. Upon whom do you rely when you have a problem with the young black male who lives in your household?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent answered “myself”

18. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Data Highlights: one hundred percent of the persons provided no detail on the space provided for their responses.

Conclusion

The researcher believes that this research study has only scratched the surface on the impact it can make at Ebenezer A.M.E. Church in Rahway, New Jersey; throughout its surrounding area and within other local churches. Attempting to close the educational achievement gap among young black males is extremely hard work and will require support from families, congregations, community leaders, educators and concerned citizens over a sustained amount of time.

Moving forward, support from families is critical in closing the educational achievement gap of young black males ages eleven to seventeen because when families engage their young black males’ they will have better self-esteem, better self-identity, they will adapt better to school, attend more regularly, and most importantly they will earn higher grades and test scores. Single parent households must engage their young black males ages eleven to seventeen by being more relational, more interactive and more developmental in their approach with their loved ones.

Families must also create literacy friendly home environments by providing books and reading to their loved ones. This will improve his vocabulary, knowledge, language skills and reading comprehension. These books don’t have to be purchased. Instead these books can be borrowed from the local library and/or accessed through internet based

resources. Families must also visit the local library, obtain library cards for the whole family because local libraries are a great way to promote a loved one's language and literacy development.

My local congregation must make closing the educational achievement gap of young black males ages eleven to seventeen a top priority on its church mission statement. Ebenezer A.M.E. Church's Christian Education Department, Church School Team and as many church leaders as possible must direct their time, energy, efforts, curriculum and financial resources towards these young black males ages eleven to seventeen. My local congregation has several retired educators who could easily be an asset to these young black males ages eleven to seventeen by offering complimentary tutorial services; encouragement; and track their academic progress while providing invaluable mentorship.

Local governmental leaders must offer increased opportunities to engage these young black males ages eleven to seventeen in local government, civic life and share various resources which promote an increased love for learning. For example, local governmental leaders like mayors, city council members and freeholders can create youth councils. Youth councils will allow these young black males ages eleven to seventeen an opportunity to sit in on council meetings, hear various presentations from elected officials plus tour City Hall and municipal facilities. Exposure to a new world may spark an interest in these young black males ages eleven to seventeen to become change agents in their community to make it a better place. Local governmental officials can also offer internships, job shadowing and even employment during the summer months.

Once families, members of my local congregation, local governmental officials, local school superintendents, principals, vice principals, guidance counselors along with myself diligently work on this important issue affecting young black males ages eleven to seventeen for a period of time; I will be in a better position to create a ministry manual.

The ministry manual is a resource guide which will contain the methods in which all of these partners in ministry used in order to close the educational achievement gap in young black males ages eleven to seventeen. Finally, the ministry manual will be shared with various Pastors both inside my denomination and across denominational and non-denominational lines

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